

Testimony on the FY-1993 Appropriation for the Library of Congress

Presented to the U.S. House of Representatives, Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch (Committee on Appropriations), by Samuel R. Gammon, Executive Director, American Historical Association, Speaking on behalf of the National Humanities Alliance

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I am Samuel R. Gammon, Executive Director of the American Historical Association, Immediate Past President of the National Humanities Alliance, and retired Foreign Service Officer. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the FY-1993 appropriation for the Library of Congress, on behalf of the National Humanities Alliance. I speak for professional historians in the United States and in a general way for the scholarly community, perhaps the heaviest users of the Library of Congress and of its many services both directly to scholars and indirectly through the other research libraries and state libraries throughout the United States. The Library of Congress is important in its own right, but also is the keystone of the rapidly expanding arch of information services throughout the country.

This is the second time in which I have had the opportunity to appear in support of the Library of Congress before this subcommittee. On the earlier occasion, 4 March 1986, the impact of reductions required by the implementation of the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Budget Reduction Act threatened the Library in a number of ways -- from significantly reduced access due to reductions in hours (closing Sundays and all week nights except Wednesday); reductions in acquisitions; and staff reductions that hit the cataloging division with particular severity. My colleagues and I were grateful to the subcommittee for its success in winning support for less onerous reductions in 1986 but it is fair to say that the ramifications of the reductions continued to be felt for several years thereafter.

Today, under comparatively happier circumstances -- at least in terms of the budget for the Library of Congress, I come to urge the subcommittee to fully fund the budget level requested for FY1993 for the Library of Congress. The appropriation for FY-1992 that the subcommittee won approval for last year is an accomplishment for which our constituency is most thankful. The significant increase for the present Fiscal Year has allowed the Library to move more swiftly on its initiatives that address many of the most pressing problems facing the library including the reduction of the huge arrearage of uncatalogued items and development of additional storage space convenient to the Library's central location. While the budget recommendations for FY-93 have not yet been released, our understanding is that the proposals for next year will call for continuation of those initiatives with slightly expanded resources and continuation of the core services of the Library.

For scholars, the Library of Congress is the greatest single research resource in the world -- and for scholars in the humanities, the dependence on library resources is paramount for, as Stanley Katz remarked, "we are the people of the book. " (Katz, Stanley N. "The Plight of the Humanities in the Research University", a lecture for the Public Lectures Committee, Princeton University, delivered 14 November 1991.) The materials held by the library in its many special collections as well as general collection -- from the many collections of archival materials of major scholarly and scientific societies to the enormous trove of materials that document popular culture -- are superb both in their depth and accessibility. The foreign acquisitions of the Library are of critical importance for many scholars because they not only strengthen the universal character of the collections but, in many instances, constitute the only copies available in the U.S.

The key role that the Library plays in the general health of libraries in the U.S. is well known and, we trust, will continue without serious impediment. The rapidly expanding role the Library has played in extending access to its collections through advanced technology is less well known. When one thinks of the many changes initiated and/or facilitated by LC in recent years, the list is rich and lengthy. Examples of recently expanded access include:

- * The LC Direct program launched last year which provides online service with 33 state libraries significantly upgrades the access to LC bibliographic files;
- * The American Memory project provides access to computerized selections on history and culture from the LC's collection of books, documents, photographs, motion pictures, and so forth for libraries, colleges, and others; and
- * Embrittled materials that have been microfilmed or electronically preserved become readily accessible to scholars across the land.

In addition, the Library's early participation in the National Research and Education Network (Last year, Congress enacted the High-Performance Computing Act [PL 102-194] which calls for the establishment of the National Research and Education Network [NREN]. LC has been an early participant in planning for the electronic network which when operational should provide much wider access to LC databases.) should contribute importantly to the development of an overarching information system as well as further facilitating access to the Library's databases.

Another issue that I want to discuss briefly is the problem of the Library's need for more collection storage facilities. Discussion with Library staff indicate that the accelerating growth of collections is necessarily leading to more and more materials stored outside of the central facilities of the Jefferson and Adams buildings. As has been discussed in earlier hearings, the Library is working with the Architect of the Capitol to secure more collection storage nearby but this will take several years to come to fruition. In the meantime, the Library has developed a plan to bring together these dispersed materials in a central location at its Landover Center Annex in a high density storage system such as those used in Japan. Such a change would facilitate access to remotely stored, and presently inaccessible, materials. We heartily endorse this strategy and urge that the additional funds required for implementation be included in the appropriation.

Finally, in closing, I wish to reserve the right to augment this statement for the record after the budget is released and there has been time to study it. In addition, I urge the subcommittee to schedule future hearings sufficiently after the release of the budget to facilitate more specific recommendations from the public witnesses.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the subcommittee today. My colleagues and I in the National Humanities Alliance greatly appreciate care, focus, and good judgment that you bring to your important role in preserving and nurturing the national treasure that is the Library of Congress.