

Statement of Dr. James H. Billington
The Librarian of Congress
Before the Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Fiscal 2014 Budget Request
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Mr. Chairman, Ms. Wasserman Schultz, Members of the Subcommittee:

It is an honor to provide this testimony to the Subcommittee's new Chairman, Mr. Alexander, to welcome Ms. Wasserman Schultz back to the Subcommittee, and to thank the entire Committee for its strong continuing support and good counsel for the Library of Congress.

We have not yet submitted the Library of Congress's fiscal 2014 budget request, which is due to the Subcommittee on March 1, 2013. However, I can tell you now that the Library's budget request will seek support only to maintain current mission-critical services. We will not be requesting program increases, but only inflationary adjustments to our fiscal 2013 continuing resolution base funding level.

Mr. Chairman, the Library of Congress is the largest and most wide-ranging collection of the world's recorded knowledge ever assembled anywhere by any one institution, and also the closest thing to a mint record of the cultural and intellectual creativity of the American people. It was created and has been sustained for 213 years by the Congress of the United States. The Library has served the Congress directly for nearly 200 years with the nation's largest law library, and for nearly 100 years with its primary research arm: the Congressional Research Service.

Congress's Library is in many ways an embodiment in our Capitol of the distinctively American ideal of a knowledge-based democracy. We have already become a large-scale, free, educational resource for our K-12 educational system by placing online more than 37 million primary source digital files of our nation's history and culture together with clear explanations by our curators.

For two decades your library has been training teachers and librarians in the effective use of these multi-medial resources. Our National Digital Library/American Memory project empowers teachers and motivates students. Even at surprisingly early ages, children begin asking their own questions rather than struggling to memorize somebody else's answers and often tune-out of learning altogether.

Congress's Library, which is America's oldest federal cultural institution, has become a very innovative institution for keeping our democracy dynamic in the information age. And we are doing all of this with 1,300 less staff than we had 20 years ago, before we had begun our program both for putting online our best collections and quarterbacking a congressionally

mandated national program with now more than 290 partner institutions for preserving the growing tsunami of important material digitized elsewhere.

It will not be easy to sustain our unique leadership role in the three core necessities of any library, but particularly in a library that serves the entire American people by (1) acquiring important records of human knowledge and creativity (2) preserving them, and (3) making them maximally accessible. “Memory, reason, and imagination” were the three categories into which Thomas Jefferson organized his private library, which became the seed bed for the Library of Congress’s universal collections and unique curatorial staff.

We are now very close to the point where we may have to reduce significantly one or all of these three key functions that we provide for America, both onsite and online. This might involve further reduction to our staff, which currently accounts for 65 percent of our overall annual budget and 90 percent of the budget of the Congressional Research Service. We have had virtually flat budgets in recent years, and, if we are faced with another set of across-the-board cuts, the Library would risk a decline in our core services at precisely the time our mission is becoming more important than ever for America.

If we had to miss one year’s subscription to a scientific publication that we had acquired for 50 years, we would lose not just one fiftieth, but half of its usefulness, and would never fully be recovered in the future. Any further reduction in staff would severely weaken our pioneering efforts to merge traditional and digital services into one-stop shopping for the objective and comprehensive information needed by Congress and the nation. We could hardly continue training the new type of librarian for the 21st century that we call knowledge navigators that would replicate for the future the wisdom and judgment of our magnificent world class curators.

The most critical budget matter before all of us at this time is sequestration. My statement will address the impact sequestration will have on the Library’s mission and programs, if it takes effect. I will do so by pointing out what the consequences would be of a sequester and additional budget cuts, not just for the Library, but for the national interest of the United States.

The Library is, quite simply, an irreplaceable asset for the United States. I have called it the nation’s strategic information reserve. It was for instance the only institution anywhere able to give back to the Afghan people enough copies of historical records of their own legal past to resume a tradition that had been eradicated by the Taliban. And the Library possessed the only paper produced in the U.S. government that described from an obscure Arabic periodical the basic terrorist scenario followed on 9/11 before it happened.

The Library of Congress is the largest legislative branch agency and it uniquely provides four primary services for the nation, and, indeed the world: a de facto national library for the United States, the U.S. Copyright Office for innovative creators, the Congressional Research Service for the legislative and oversight work of the Congress, and a National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped.

The Library of Congress supports the entire library system of America with its cataloging standards and services, its multi-formatted preservation research, and its creation and distribution

of special reading materials for blind Americans, and the free access it provides the American people to primary documents of history and culture onsite and online.

The U.S. Copyright Office administers U.S. copyright law, publicly documents the ownership of American works, and plays a fundamental role in the \$890 billion segment of the U.S. economy that produces and distributes content.

The Congressional Research Service provides non-partisan information and analysis of legislative and public policy issues to all Members of Congress

While some agencies are made up of bureaus or component organizations that could be cut out or scaled back without crippling the agency's ability to accomplish its mission, the Library of Congress is different. Nothing is ancillary. Each component relies on others—and benefits from the diversity and specialized expertise of our skilled workforce.

The role and potential of the Library of Congress is becoming even more important now than ever before in our history. Harnessing knowledge and creativity may well be more important to our economic future than anything else, but knowledge and creativity never stand still. We cannot stop or severely slow down the Library's work without beginning to degrade irreversibly our ability to sustain the nation's intellectual and creative capital.

Continuing to acquire a universal knowledge is, by necessity, a multicultural pursuit. Jefferson's library included material in more than a dozen languages, and the Library of Congress today has the most multi-lingual and multi-formatted collection in a world that is becoming increasingly more diverse and globally interdependent.

We understand the imperative to cut government spending. The Library has been “doing more with less.” Over the last five years the Library's total appropriation has increased only 2.6 percent, from \$613.5 million to \$629.2 million, and staffing levels this budget will support has declined by 340 FTE over the same period.

Since fiscal 2010 the Library has sustained a reduction of \$52 million, or 8 percent of its base budget. This reduction does not include the effective additional cut the Library has received because of increases in operating costs not addressed through cost-of-living and price-level increases. The Library has reduced staffing by 186 positions through the fiscal 2012 VERA/VSIP program and have made it necessary for us to explore other possible ways to sustain the core mission without uniformly degrading all services across the institution.

Despite these efforts, the budget reductions of the past two years have had unavoidable negative impacts, such as:

- The loss of 24 CRS analysts and attorneys, including a key senior intelligence analyst and senior Asia specialist. CRS no longer has the flexibility to shift resources to develop new analytical capacity nor to extend or expand research capacity in demanding and complex areas such as health care, energy development, military weaponry and financial regulation.

- A 36 percent reduction in CRS expenditures for professional staff development and an 18 percent reduction in research materials such as subscriptions and databases.
- A 25 percent decrease in obligation levels for the purchase of library and law acquisitions and a 20 percent decrease in the number of items purchased with these funds.
- The loss of 22 staff providing curatorial service in multiple divisions.
- A decrease in the Library's production of catalog records by approximately 50,000 in 2012. This affects every library in the United States that relies on our creating these records for providing access to their own collections.
- Delays in processing copyright registrations potentially leading to another backlog of pending claims, and negatively affecting copyright-related commerce.
- A reduction of 50 percent in our budget for converting the extraordinary collections of the Library into digital formats and making them freely available online to the American people. (This is partly the result of mandatory requirements to increase cyber-security.)

And now we are preparing for a potential sequester and an additional budget reduction currently estimated at 5.3 percent.

Since such a high percentage of the Library's federal budget supports staff pay, it is virtually impossible to implement a 5.3 percent cut in fiscal 2013 through reductions in the Library's discretionary non-pay resources alone. The potential sequestration will have to be addressed through a combination of additional staffing reductions, the imposition of furlough days for all staff, and reductions in preservation work, information technology support, training, travel, supplies, equipment, and facilities management. Reductions made necessary by sequestration will require scaling back a wide range of programs, many of which fall under the rubric of core, mission-critical services that will directly affect the Congress and the American people.

Specific impacts of sequestration will include the following:

- 400,000 or more collection items will not be acquired, resulting in gaps in the collections that may never be filled.
- The number of books we are able to preserve through mass deacidification will be reduced by as much as two-thirds, and the financial viability of the sole company that provides these mass deacidification services is likely to be severely threatened.
- Binding of books will be severely reduced; resulting in damage to the collections and the curtailment of interlibrary loan, as well as a significant reduction in business for the Library's commercial binding vendors.

- Basic operational services such as security, cleaning, food, trash removal, and pest control will be cut back, lessening health and safety protections for staff and visitors.
- CRS will be unable to maintain current levels of coverage of public policy issues, response times to congressional requests will lengthen, and “rush” requests will be difficult to meet. CRS will also be unable to answer some requests that require certain data and research materials.
- The U.S. Copyright Office’s registration program will develop a backlog of Copyright claims waiting processing and a related decrease in fee income to support ongoing operations. The Copyright staff will have to curtail participation in some international negotiations and other policy efforts important to U.S. trade interests.
- The National Library for the Blind will postpone the conversion of 5,000 legacy titles and decrease production of new titles from the expected number of 2,100 to 1,890. This reduction will reduce the availability of reading material provided to the blind and physically handicapped community.

As you know, implementing employee furlough days is only a stopgap measure; but unless we implement furloughs in fiscal 2014 and fiscal 2015, we would have to decrease further or discontinue other mission-critical services.

While I have listed some of the negative impacts of past and potential future budget cuts, there has been an important strategic bright spot amid the practical difficulties posed by our current budget environment: It has encouraged the entire Library to work better together in pursuit of Library-wide goals. As one example, we have made major strides in improving the Library’s Web presence in a unified effort that has brought together existing – not new – resources and expertise from across the Library. Our new beta site, *Congress.gov*, providing legislative information to the Congress and the American people, is an example of this collaborative work.

The Library’s current principal budget needs include sustaining collection acquisitions, constructing preservation facilities at Ft. Meade, and providing for the critical services of the U.S. Copyright Office, and of CRS expertise for the Congress.

Sustaining acquisitions is the basic prerequisite for fulfilling the Library’s mission. The current budget environment has slowed the Library’s acquisitions and preservation efforts, creating gaps in the collections that may never be recovered. This will affect the Library’s capacity to provide research and analysis for the Congress and its ability to provide the American public with access to many materials that are unattainable anywhere else.

Continuing to implement the Ft. Meade master plan through the funding of Module 5 is essential for preserving and making accessible the Library’s unparalleled collections. The master plan contemplates the construction of 13 collections storage modules, only four of which have been completed. This project is currently ten years behind schedule, and Module 5 is an

urgent Library need to be funded through the Architect of the Capitol, under Library Buildings and Grounds, as he has requested since 2010.

The U.S. Copyright Office administers the national copyright registration and recordation systems and serves as the principal advisor to the Congress on issues of domestic and international copyright policy, in accordance with Title 17 of the U.S. Code. The Office's electronic registration service directly supports both the nation's copyright commerce and our people's creative innovations. The current budget environment puts this service at risk of significant setbacks in active participation in policy efforts that are important to America's leadership in the information age.

Maintaining CRS' expertise is critical to fulfilling the Library's highest priority: service to the Congress with timely, objective, authoritative, and confidential research and analysis in support of its legislative and oversight responsibilities.

The budget reduction in fiscal year 2012 left CRS at its lowest staffing level in more than three decades. Although CRS has responded by expanding analysts' portfolios to cover expertise gaps, any additional reductions will increase the difficulty of providing the specialized skills and policy expertise needed to support the growing policy demands placed upon the Congress. More than 10,000 bills have typically been introduced in recent Congresses along with hundreds of hearings. We will give high priority to protecting services that CRS performs for the Congress in this and future budgets

Mr. Chairman, the Congress of the United States has been the greatest patron of a library in human history. Each year, the Library is privileged to serve directly all members and committees of Congress—and millions of Americans, often in ways that would otherwise be unavailable to them. We want to continue these services at the level of quality that distinguishes our institution. Through networks of partners, we can participate in new projects that will make new friends – for America abroad, such as our free new World Digital Library in seven languages that has already been adopted by UNESCO and attracted 30 million largely young viewers from around the world. We, as a nation, need what the library is uniquely doing.

We will work hard and creatively with whatever the Congress can provide—but with the fervent hope that history will not record that this one-of-a-kind still-innovative and proactive creation of the American Congress did not unintentionally and almost invisibly reach the point where it began a downhill slide from which it would never quite recover.

Mr. Chairman, Ms. Wasserman Schultz, and Members of the Subcommittee, I thank you again for your support of the Library.