

# WASHINGTON HOTLINE



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Rep. Major Owens (D-NY) was the lead-off witness at a hearing October 29 on his bill, HR 683, to require that the Librarian of Congress "be appointed from among individuals who have specialized training or significant experience in the field of library and information science." The hearing was held by the Committee on House Administration Subcommittee on Libraries and Memorials. Chairman Mary Rose Oakar (D-OH) noted that her mother was a librarian and said librarians were "undervalued, underpaid, and underrecognized."

Rep. Oakar complimented Rep. Owens on his comprehensive statement in tracing the history of LC leadership. Owens wished the new Librarian James Billington "a long, happy, and productive tenure." He noted that over the years since LC's founding in 1802, it has been transformed into the world's premier library, yet the law remains unchanged and provides no guidance on qualifications. In contrast, the Solicitor General is required to be "learned in the law," and the Surgeon General is required to have "specialized training or significant experience in public health programs."

Owens felt the three Librarians of Congress with library training or significant library experience---Ainsworth Rand Spofford (1864-97), Herbert Putnam (1899-1939), and L. Quincy Mumford (1954-74)---made the most significant contributions to the Library's development, and he listed their accomplishments and innovations. For the future, Owens said that federal information policy should be coordinated by the Librarian of Congress, who must be an authoritative voice and a great communicator for information systems as well as for culture.

Also testifying were ALA President-elect F. William Summers, ARL President Herbert Johnson, and SLA President Emily Mobley. ALA strongly endorsed HR 683. ARL and SLA suggested other qualifications were also important in the appointment of a Librarian of Congress.

Subcommittee member Bill Frenzel (R-MN) said he would hate to see criteria which fenced out such individuals as Daniel Boorstin and James Billington. He observed that Rep. Owens was concerned about information policy developments at agencies such as OMB over which LC had no control.

Rep. Oakar, noting witnesses' concern with the advancement of library and information science particularly as related to new technology, asked whether a special congressional committee could look at this rather than changing the law. ALA's Bill Summers responded that LC's role was a complex one in support of Congress as well as a leader in the development of information systems for the U.S. and the world. The issue can't be once addressed and resolved, he said; it would be best to have Librarians who are knowledgeable in the library and information science field.

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