

Testimony of  
**Dr. Deanna Marcum**

February 7, 2008

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Associate Librarian for Library Services, Library of Congress

Hearing before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary

"The Founding Fathers' Papers: Ensuring Public Access to our National Treasures"

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Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee:

As the Associate Librarian of the Library of Congress, I serve as the Library's representative on the National Historical Publications and Records Commission of the National Archives.

I am pleased to know that the Judiciary Committee has taken an interest in making the papers of the Founding Fathers more accessible to the American people. Libraries across the country and the Library of Congress, in particular, are devoted to making information resources available and useful to their fellow citizens.

Federal tax dollars have been used for more than 50 years to fund the scholarly editions of Founding Fathers' papers. It seems appropriate that the results of the scholars' work be made more accessible to the American people as soon as possible. The system now in place is slow, laborious, and expensive--and unfortunately, the results are not widely accessible.

The Library of Congress has been a pioneer in providing digital access to historical resources. In the early 1990s, even before the Internet was in widespread use, the Library of Congress established the American Memory project making our unique primary documents illuminating American history much more widely available to our fellow citizens. We converted those materials to digital form and produced CD-ROMs for distribution to schools. The Internet has allowed us to make these materials much more widely available, not just to America, but to the world. Our acclaimed Web site, originally intended to provide resources for the K-12 community, has proved to be enormously useful to the educational and academic communities and the general public. In 2007, the Library's Web site recorded over 5 billion individual transactions -- a clear indication of our effectiveness and commitment to access.

The Library of Congress serves as the custodial home of the presidential papers from George Washington to Calvin Coolidge, with the notable exception of the Adams papers. Prior to the creation of the National Archives in 1934, the Library was the historical repository for such materials. To make the materials of the Founding Fathers more widely available, the Library of Congress has digitized from microfilm and made available on our Web site all of the presidential papers of Washington, Jefferson, and Madison as part of our American Memory project.

The proposal that the Library of Congress serve as the host for the digitized collections of Founding Fathers' papers is not without precedent. In 2004, the Library of Congress, in a memorandum of understanding, collaborated with the National Endowment for the Humanities to develop the National Digital Newspaper Program. In the 1980s and 1990s, the NEH funded the U.S. Newspaper Program, in collaboration with the Library of Congress, that resulted in thousands of state-based newspapers being cataloged and preserved on microfilm. Today's library users are not interested in microfilm. Digital technology gives us the ability to deliver content--of all types--to the users' digital devices. To take the content we have preserved and sustained over the years to our users, we must convert it to digital form and deliver it to the devices preferred by our users. NEH, as part of its We the People initiative, decided to provide grants to states to convert selectively their microfilmed newspapers to digital form. NEH asked the Library of Congress to assume responsibility for hosting the digital content, preserving it, and making it accessible to today's and future users. The specifics of our memorandum of understanding are quite simple. NEH uses its grant funding to support the states' conversion of microfilm to digital files. The Library of Congress has funded staff to develop the specifications for digitization, software tools for production, a user interface to the content, and the long-term preservation of the digital resources. NEH has provided a scaled administrative fee to support these Library activities.

With adequate funding, digital versions of the Founding Fathers' papers might be treated in a similar way. The Library of Congress could combine digital versions of the papers in a single Web site that would provide a convenient, easy-to-use, impartial, and free venue. Our track record in this area is unparalleled.

The Library of Congress's interest is in making America's history available to Americans. Our mission is to make resources available and useful to the Congress and the American people. The raw materials of history should be instantly and freely accessible for all. The Library of Congress would be honored to play a role, assuming a combination of appropriated and private funding, in providing that access.

Thank you for inviting me to testify. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.