<center>Statement of</center>

The Honorable Patrick Leahy

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United States Senator
Vermont
February 7, 2008
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Statement Of Senator Patrick Leahy,
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee,
Hearing on "The Founding Fathers' Papers:
Ensuring Public Access to our National Treasures"
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Today, the Committee holds an important hearing on improving public access to the Papers of our Nation's Founding Fathers. Later this month, we will celebrate the 276th birthday of our first President -- George Washington. There is much to be learned from our Founders and our shared national history. I am pleased that the Committee is examining this important issue.

As the son of a Vermont printer, I was steeped from childhood in a deep appreciation of the First Amendment, in the power of the written word, and in the value and the vitality of our Nation's rich history -- to us, and to each future generation of Americans. I also appreciate the distinguished panel of historians, scholars and government officials who are here with us today, to discuss the Founding Fathers' Papers. The works of our Founding Fathers are part of the identity and heritage of every American. And, we should do everything possible to make certain that these Papers are available, accessible and affordable to the American people.

More than a half century ago, our Nation undertook the important task of making the correspondence, diaries and other writings of its six Founding Fathers -- George Washington, James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin and Alexander Hamilton -- available to the American people. Yet, sadly, this work remains largely incomplete and inaccessible to most Americans.

Today, the commonly referred to "letter press projects" operate at major universities and other institutions across the country. Although the first volumes of the Papers were published in the 1950s, only the Papers of Alexander Hamilton have been completed. According to the National Historic Publication and Records Commission ("NHPRC"), the Papers of Thomas Jefferson will not be completed until 2025, the Washington Papers in 2023, the Papers of Franklin and Madison in 2030, and the Adams Papers in 2050 -- almost 100 years after the projects began.

The amount of federal taxpayer funds that has been spent on these projects is staggering. According to the NHPRC, nearly $30 million in federal taxpayer funds has been spent on the letter press projects since 1965. And, it is estimated that more than $60 million in combined public and private funds has been spent on these projects to date. Equally troubling is that the cost of these materials puts the Papers well out of reach for many institutions and for most

Americans. Just one volume of the Hamilton Papers costs $180, and the price for the complete 26 volume set of these Papers is about $2,600. Not surprisingly, a recent poll found that only a few libraries had just one volume of the Papers and only six percent had more than one volume.

While there is certainly good reason to look back and assign blame for the delay and cost of the letter press projects, I believe that the interest of the American people is best served by looking forward, so that we find new ways to finally open the Founding Fathers' Papers to the American people.

As a long-time advocate for Internet use, I believe that the World Wide Web offers a unique opportunity to digitize the Founding Fathers' Papers and to publish these historical documents online. Fortunately, some of the Papers are already available online. But, there is a great need to expand the online access to these documents. While there is certainly great value in the outstanding scholarship that has gone into the edited volumes of the Papers, the Papers themselves too hold great value and they should be shared with the American people. Countless Americans have gained valuable insights and developed important connections to our national heritage by simply viewing the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights on display at the National Archives. For this reason, I support the prompt digitization of all of the Founding Fathers' Papers, so that this information can be made available to all Americans via the Internet. If Jefferson, Adams, Hamilton and Franklin could pipe into this discussion today, we all know that they would ask, "What are you waiting for?" Harnessing the exquisite power of the Internet to preserve and proliferate the Founders' papers is a marriage made in Heaven.

When he was asked recently about the troubling lack of access to the Founding Fathers' Papers, Presidential historian and author David McCullough, who joins us today, said that "[t]hese volumes of the founders are more of a monument than anything built in stone . . . I don't want people to wait another 50 years." I share Mr. McCullough's sense of urgency.

Today, we have a new opportunity to write a new chapter in the history of the Founding Fathers' Papers. I trust that we will all work together to ensure that these important records of our Nation's heritage are open and available to all Americans.

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