

Documents

Less Access to Less Information by and about the U.S. Government

A 1981 Chronology

From the Washington office of the American Library Association
(January 1982)

In the past year, the Reagan Administration has taken a series of actions which reflect a trend to restrict government information dissemination policies and programs. The new ground rules in Washington represent more than the natural shift of priorities from one administration to another. The old order has changed: information policies are being questioned and revised, programs are being examined and eliminated. The Federal Paperwork Reduction Act of 1980 (PL 96-511) provides the rationale for some of the restrictions. Another major factor is the ongoing battle of the budget which has produced many casualties including hundreds of government periodicals and pamphlets. These two factors have given the Office of Management and Budget much more influence over federal information activities.

ALA's conviction that a democratic government has an obligation to make available to its citizens the results of its actions was expressed in a resolution passed by Council in July 1981 (CD #71.2). The resolution states "... that in the development of information dissemination policies and procedures the underlying principle of any legislative or executive action continue to be free and equal public access to the data collected, compiled, produced, and published in any format by the government of these United States." With access to information an overriding ALA priority, members should be concerned about this series of actions which creates a climate in which government information activities are suspect.

Here is a partial chronology from 1981 of what seems to be an emerging pattern of restricting citizen access to government information:

April: President Reagan imposed a moratorium on the production and procurement of new audiovisual aids and government publications using the rationale that the federal government is spending too much money on public relations, publicity, and advertising. "Much of this waste consists of unnecessary and expensive films, magazines, and pamphlets."

April: The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued Bulletin No. 81-16 which provided procedures and guidelines for the

moratorium. All agencies were required to review and reduce planned or proposed publications and to develop a management control plan to curtail future spending on periodicals, pamphlets and audiovisual materials.

- June: OMB issued a model control plan to assist agencies in developing new or improved control systems to carry out the policies and guidelines in Bulletin No. 81-16, "Elimination of Wasteful Spending on Government Periodicals, Pamphlets, and Audiovisual Products."
- June: OMB Bulletin 81-21 required each federal agency to submit its plan for reviewing its information activities by September 1, 1981. The objective was to establish a process "... which forces agencies to focus on and allows us (OMB) to influence decisions on how they process, maintain, and disseminate information." Bulletin No. 81-21 also required the designation of the single official in each federal agency in the executive branch who will be responsible for information resources management as required by the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1980.
- September: David Stockman, Director of OMB, issued Memorandum 81-14, requiring heads of executive departments and agencies to pay special attention to the major information centers operated or sponsored by their agency. Among the types of information centers to be evaluated are clearinghouses, information analysis centers and resource centers. Evaluation criteria included these questions: Could the private sector provide the same or similar information services? Is the information service provided on a full-cost recovery basis?
- October: OMB Bulletin 81-16, Supplement No. 1, required agency review of all existing periodicals and recurring pamphlets to reevaluate their necessity and cost-effectiveness using OMB-approved control systems. Agencies must submit a new request for all series to be continued after January 15, 1982.
- October: New fees and royalties for government research studies and reports were announced.
- October: Public Printer Danford Sawyer, Jr. proposed to close all Government Printing Office bookstores outside of Washington, D.C. plus a few Washington locations. Approximately 24 of the 27

Documents

- GPO bookstores would be closed, because, it is claimed, they compete with the private sector and are losing money.
- October: The Justice Department submitted to Congress the Administration's proposal to severely limit the applicability of the Freedom of Information Act.
- November: According to the *Washington Post* (November 9, 1981) over 900 government publications have been or will be eliminated and the government claims that millions of dollars will be saved as a result.
- November: The *Washington Post* (November 20, 1981) also reported that the Commerce Department was considering replacing the National Technical Information Service with contracts to private firms. NTIS indexes and distributes at cost thousands of federally funded technical reports and research studies.
- November: One example of a discontinued publication is the Securities and Exchange Commission *News Digest*, hardly an ephemeral public relations piece. The SEC will continue to print it for internal use, but will no longer offer subscriptions or make it available for depository library distribution. Instead, a private firm will publish it at a 50 percent increase in price (from \$100 to \$150 per year).
- December: Citing budget cuts, the National Archives discontinued the inter-library loan of microfilm publications from the Fort Worth Federal Archives and Records Center. About 400,000 reels of census, diplomatic, pension and other records used heavily by genealogists were lent to libraries annually.

SUZANNE NEWTON

is an award winning novelist who lives in Raleigh, N.C.
Her books, for children ages 10-103 are a warm and witty
view of growing up and living in community.
People who have read her books smile a lot.

YOU CAN ORDER THESE TITLES FOR A GIFT OR A RAINY DAY:

C/O Arnold's Corners

Outspoken and independent, young Rosalee finds
herself at odds with the rest of Arnold's Corners —
"Gossip Capital of the World."

What are You Up to, William Thomas?

William Thomas, master of practical jokes, appears to
reform as he plots to humiliate his rival and save
Aunt Jessica's business.

Reubella and the Old Focus Home

With Reubella's help three elderly "young" women
transform Shad, N.C. into a new kind of retirement
community.

Send order to: _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Date: _____ Amount Enclosed _____

Quantity	Title	Unit Cost	Total
	Arnold's Corners	\$7.95	
	William Thomas	\$7.95	
	Reubella	\$7.95	
	Mail orders to: Network Ventures, Inc. P.O. Box 33614 Raleigh, N.C. 27606	Subtotal	
		10% Discount for 4 books	
		4% sales tax	
		Shipping \$1 per book	
		Total	