

# Documents

## Less Access To Less Information By and About the U.S. Government

A 1982 Chronology: January to June

*From the Washington office of the American Library Association (July 1982)*

This year, the Reagan Administration continues a series of actions begun in 1981 which reflect a trend to restrict government publications and information dissemination activities. These restrictions are due to a combination of specific policy decisions, the Administration's interpretation and implementation of the 1980 Paperwork Reduction Act (PL 96-511), and agency budget cuts. The current climate in which government agency activities are considered unnecessary frills goes well beyond the need to review information dissemination programs and to eliminate duplication and waste. The new ground rules in Washington represent more than the natural shift of priorities from one Administration to another.

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 in overriding ALA priority, members should be concerned about this series of actions which creates a climate in which government information activities are suspect.

The following partial chronology from January to June 1982 supplements a 1981 chronology prepared by the ALA Washington Office in January 1982:

**January:** The free Government Printing Office pamphlet *Selected U.S. Government Publications* used for years to alert readers to new general interest and consumer oriented government documents was discontinued because GPO says it is too expensive to mail out every month. GPO suggests that readers subscribe to the comprehensive bibliography, the *Monthly Catalog of U.S. Government Publications* which costs \$90 a year. (*Washington Post*, January 22)

**February:** The President's FY 1983 budget requested zero funding for the Library Services and Construction Act; Titles II A, B, and C of the Higher Education Act which provide funds for college library resources, research and training programs and research libraries; and the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science. Less money was proposed for

the state block grant which contains funding for school library resources and for the U.S. Postal Service subsidy which supports the fourth class library rate and other nonprofit mailing rates. (Office of Management and Budget, *Budget of the United States Government Fiscal Year 1983*)

**March:** A 300 percent increase in the cost of an annual subscription to the *Federal Register*—from \$75 to \$300—went into effect. (February 25 *Federal Register*, p. 8151). In 1981, the price of a year's subscription of the *Congressional Record* increased from \$75 to \$208. Sen. Charles Mathias (R-MD) stated that circulation of the *CR* declined almost 20 percent in the last three years as the price increased. (*New York Times*, June 2)

**March:** Many publications formerly distributed free are now available only for a fee and government agencies are urged by OMB to start charging prices high enough to recover their costs. For example, because of budget cuts, the Agriculture Department's Economic Research Service will discontinue free distribution of its publications and make these reports available only on a paid subscription basis. The alternative was to curtail basic research activities. (March 29 *FR*, p. 13178).

**March:** A reference collection standby, the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles*, is threatened because 87 of the 97 jobs remaining in the Labor Department's occupational analysis division are being eliminated. (*Washington Post*, March 2)

**April:** The President signed Executive Order 12356, National Security Information, which substantially increases the amount of information that can be classified. (April 6, *FR*, pp. 14873-14884). Critics see the Executive Order as a reversal of a 30-year government policy of automatic declassification of government documents. Although the National Archives still has the authority to review clasified documents, budget cuts are likely to limit the ability for Archives to carry out this function effectively (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 14).

**May:** The Administration supports Senate amendments to the Freedom of Information Act to restrict the type and amount of government material available to the public (*Washington Post*, May 4).

**May:** The government's two biggest collectors of statistics, the Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, have cut programs because of budget reductions. The Census Bureau has dropped numerous studies and the Bureau of Labor Statistics has asked Congress for an emergency \$5.6 million appropriation "to maintain the accuracy" of such key economic indicators as the Consumer Price Index. According to a May 4 *Washington Post* article, "Many of the programs being trimmed helped the government monitor how its programs were being used. Others helped policy makers predict economic trends." The article also quoted a business leader testifying at a congressional subcommittee hearing in March: "A million dollars saved today through short-sighted reductions in the budgets for statistical programs could lead to erroneous decisions that

would cost the private and public sectors billions of dollars over the long run."<sup>1</sup>

**May:** The Office of Management and Budget has agreed to make available a complete list of discontinued government publications as a way "...to assure an orderly and equitable transfer of discontinued government publications to the private sector." The list, which should be available in mid-July, can be obtained from Bill McQuaid (202/395-5193). (Association of American Publishers *Capital Letter*, May)

**May:** In April, the General Services Administration closed the Washington, D.C. Federal Information Center, leaving the 40 information centers in other parts of the country still operating. However, citing budget cuts, walk-in services have now been eliminated, leaving only the telephone numbers and people to answer them. A saving of \$260,000 of the centers' \$4 million annual budget is anticipated. (*Washington Post*, May 25)

**May:** *The New York Times* (May 10) reported that GPO destroyed \$11 million worth of government publications that were not selling more than 50 copies a year or earning more than \$1,000 in sales a year. The millions of documents were sold as wastepaper for \$760,000. Although a few copies of most titles have been kept in stock, generally people looking for one of the destroyed publications will be told to find it in one of the depository libraries.

**June:** In keeping with its policy to refuse to offer for public sale anything that won't yield \$1,000 a year in sales, GPO has selected only 25 of the 69 publications which the National Bureau of Standards wanted to offer for public sale. As a result, the rejected publications are available to the public only through the National Technical Information Service whose prices for NBS publications are generally two to three times higher than GPO's for the same document. (Memo from NBS official, June 14)

**June:** Continued cutbacks on free publications result in the Health and Human Services Department no longer distributing copies of *Infant Care* without charge as it has for 58 years. (*New York Times*, June 2)

**June:** The Office of Management and Budget permits federal agencies to begin putting out new publications and films, but OMB will keep a close eye on costs and top agency officials will monitor content. According to a preliminary count, the Administration has eliminated about 2,000 of the 13,000 to 15,000 publications distributed before the President's April 1981 moratorium on government book, periodicals and audiovisuals. (*Washington Post*, June 11)

1. Many of the problems encountered by government agencies at all levels and by the private sector as a result of the cutbacks in government programs are reported in the following hearings of the Subcommittee on Census and Population of the Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, House of Representatives, 97th Congress, Second Session: Impact of budget cuts on Federal statistical programs (Hearing, March 16, 1982; Supt. of Documents no. Y4.P 84/10:97-41) and Bureau of the Census fiscal 1983 budget (Hearing, February 25, 1982; Supt. of Documents no. Y4.P 84/10:97-42). These should be available in depository libraries throughout the state. —Editor's note