From the Chair

A Notable Year for Government Information

Kian Flynn

One of my favorite annual GODORT traditions returns this year after a one-year hiatus. This spring, our Publications Committee will release their selections for the most notable government documents of the year. This year's release will feature publications from a *two*-year span between late 2020 to late 2022, which means double the amount of gov pubs fun!

GODORT's Notable Documents list began in the early 1980s and has been published annually in *Library Journal* since 1986. Government publications in all formats and across all jurisdictions (local, federal, and international) are celebrated. Creation of the list was proposed in the hopes that the list would raise awareness of government documents in libraries and among library users.

I've been a long-time fan of year-end lists and retrospectives. I appreciate the annual opportunity to reflect back on the stretch of time we've just been through and take stock of the highs and the lows.

There is certainly a lot to reflect on in the last two years of government information and publications. It has been a significant two years not just in the weight of the topics (from climate change around the world to insurrection at the US Capitol) covered by government publications, but also in the nature of their release (from a controversial leak of a Supreme Court draft opinion to a Twitter ownership change that resulted in the reinstatement of previously banned accounts of government officials).

The mishandling of government documents also featured heavily in the news in the past year with reports of the Trump Administration using "burn bags" and the toilet to dispose of government documents in violation of the law. Controversy also erupted when the FBI executed a search warrant of the Trump residence at Mar-a-Lago and retrieved hundreds of classified documents.

There are joys in reflecting on the year in government information, too. It reminds us of the depth, breadth, and importance of the collections that we as librarians are charged with preserving and providing public access to. While we just lived through these two tumultuous years, experiencing in real time the breaking news and the headlines, too soon these years will be our distant past and these documents will be the primary sources that future generations of scholars will use to make sense of our era.

The past few years were also a reminder that significant government document releases don't just match with today's headlines, they shed light on yesterday's headlines as well. In 2021, the Biden Administration mandated the release of thousands of additional documents related to the 1963 assassination of President Kennedy. And in 2022, much to the delight of genealogists everywhere, the US Census Bureau released the full 1950 US Census records to the public, in accordance with the 72-year rule. One release fills in gaps from our nation's history and one fills in details of our own family histories while also serving as a snapshot of our nation at one point in time in a way no other primary source document can.

While we have turned the page to 2023 and there's a lot we'd like to forget about the past couple of years, it'll be worth one look back when the GODORT Notable Documents list is released in *Library Journal* this spring. Let this also serve as a reminder to be making note of the documents that catch your eye in 2023—nominations are accepted year-round at https://www.ala.org/rt/godort/godortnotabledocumentnominationform.

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