

American Library Association

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ALA President Leslie Burger Testifies Before Senate Environment and Public Works Committee

This morning, February 6, 2007, ALA President Leslie Burger testified before the U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, chaired by Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA), concerning the recent closure of several libraries in the Environmental and Protection Agency (EPA).

"As one recently retired EPA librarian described it," Burger said in her testimony, "the EPA libraries have been functioning like a virtual National Library on the Environment. Now that some of these regional libraries and the pesticide library are closed, key links have been removed from the chain, thus weakening the whole system."

Burger also addressed the EPA's lack of openness with regard to digitizing its materials. "Without more detailed information about the EPA's digitization project, we cannot assess whether they are digitizing the most appropriate materials, whether there is appropriate metadata or cataloging to make sure that people can access the digitized materials, and that the technology that will be used to host the digital content and the finding software meets today's standards."

Problems caused by the closings and cutbacks at several key EPA libraries were emphasized in various senators' opening remarks. Other supportive witnesses also referenced the library problems and the issues around limiting public access to important environmental information.

Today's oversight hearing, the first in a series looking into EPA's recent actions, also featured testimony from EPA Director Stephen Johnson, who was grilled by Senator Boxer for his lack of knowledge about the libraries. Boxer produced several emails concerning the disposal of library materials and as she produced each one slapped it down onto the podium. Johnson testified that he had no knowledge of these emails or of any directives for disposing of materials, aside from those that were duplicates. Senator Boxer gave Johnson one month to respond to questions he wasn't willing or able to answer.

The ALA Washington Office strongly suggests ALA members and library



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supporters [write Senator Boxer](#) and thank her for defending librarians against charges of being "alarmist" and "hysterical," for calling the Administrator to task for his treatment of EPA libraries, and for standing up for the public's right to know.

The ALA Committee on Legislation and two of its subcommittees – Federal Libraries Subcommittee and Government Information Subcommittee, as well as other ALA units including GODORT – have worked on the EPA library closings issues in recent months.

For more information, including Burger's full testimony, please visit www.ala.org/epalibraries. Pictures of the testimony are available on the [ALA Washington Office Flickr page](#).

Statements from both majority and minority senators on the committee can be found at <http://epw.senate.gov/public>.



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