

## Department of Commerce Announces Intention to Close NTIS

The Commerce Department made a "surprise" announcement on August 12 that it would close the National Technical Information Services (NTIS). Commerce Secretary William M. Daley indicated that NTIS's core business—the sale of government documents in microfiche and on paper—"is rapidly becoming less of the necessity it was as agencies and groups have begun to post their reports on the Internet for free." Daley proposes transferring NTIS archives to the Library of Congress and having government agencies provide scientific technical and information (STI) to the public for free via the Internet for "long periods of time."

Daley's announcement followed reports that congressional appropriators decided not to fund \$2 million to supplement the NTIS budget. Established in 1950, NTIS has provided fee-based access to government scientific and technical reports and is supposed to be self-supporting through its sales program. The Commerce Department argued that "changes in the information marketplace have made obsolete the need for NTIS to serve as a clearinghouse and, thus have in turn made it increasingly difficult for NTIS to maintain its operation on a self-sustaining basis, as established by Congress."

The NTIS statutory mandate to be self-supporting was a key issue raised at a September 14 hearing on the proposal by the Subcommittee on Technology of the House Science Committee. Testifying on behalf of five library associations was Caroline C. Long, assistant university librarian for collection services at George Washington University Library. In addition to ALA, Long testified on behalf of the American Association of Law Libraries, the Association of Research Libraries, the Medical Library Association, and the Special Library Association.

"It is imperative the essential functions and services that NTIS provides continue, whether at NTIS or at other federal agencies," Long

said. "These core functions—inherently governmental—are identifying, collecting, disseminating and archiving scientific, technical, and business information."

Other witnesses included Deputy Secretary of Commerce Robert Mallett, who was asked critical questions about how the department came to its decision, and even if they had consulted with the Library of Congress before announcing their proposal. (They had not.)

Public Printer Michael DiMario testified to the importance of including STI in the Federal Depository Library Program. He also emphasized that, "the similarities in function between GPO and NTIS, the fact that both are experienced in operating on revolving funds, the potential for valuable synergies of technologies and staff expertise that could benefit public access to Government information—all of these are reasons for a realignment of NTIS functions with GPO."

Ken Allen, chair of the NTIS advisory committee, spoke about the importance of STI and the need to have both electronic and tangible/paper formats continue to be available. Bonnie Carroll, president of the Information International Associates, Inc., also argued the need for continuing to keep multiple formats available during the infancy of the Internet.

All of the witnesses spoke about the need to thoughtfully and systematically approach the closing of NTIS and how to retain its important functions, including addressing the problems of fugitive documents and permanent public access.

Librarian of Congress James H. Billington wrote for the record: "Given adequate resources, [LOC could] be a logical successor to NTIS for those functions that compliment the Library's mission." However, such NTIS functions as high volume document distribution, brokering agency databases to the information industry, and publication of information products "are beyond the Library's current mandate."

ALA will continue to monitor this critical issue. ■

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