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Good morning. During the past year I have seen many of you at meetings - in places such as Boston, Atlanta, New Orleans, Albany, Minneapolis, Detroit and San Antonio. Now I am able to welcome all of you to Washington. And I must say it is a real pleasure. You come into the nation's capital like a fresh breeze springing from communities in every section of our country. And we need you.

Your presence here today reflects your personal commitment, and that of your institutions, to the Depository Library Program.

The theme of this conference is public service. I suggest we take that theme to heart- make it more than a slogan. Make it a call to arms for GPO and the library community.

I have lived and worked in Washington for some 25 years -- a quarter of a century. I have observed politics and Federal institutions as a newspaper reporter, as a student of government, and as the manager of a publishing firm. And I believe we are entering a period of profound change.

It is no secret that the unwritten rules of politics and journalism have changed. The media is probing more deeply into what was once considered the private lives of public officials. One party leader has suggested that there be a statute of limitations for politicians - with the media going back just 10 or 20 years into a candidate's life. Under pressure, politicians are giving new definition to what constitutes ethical conduct - or unwarranted privileges.

So what? What does it mean to us? We are not running for office. None of us expect the next knock on the door to be Mike Wallace of 60 Minutes.

But it does have meaning for us, because we live and work in an environment affected by these changes. The elected officials who vote the funds for our programs, and oversee these programs, are under intense new pressures.

There is evidence of real anger in the American public. You see it on the evening news and read about it in the morning papers. It runs deep. It is anger about unemployment, about huge deficits, about bank failures. And about the perceived failures of leadership and government. We have entered a time when even the most desirable and most needed Federal programs cannot be funded to a level that meets demand. We have entered a time when a skeptical public no longer believes spending money will solve many problems. And we have entered a time when some agencies must reinvent themselves or their programs.

Those who succeed will start with a brutally honest examination of themselves and the needs of their customers. And I make a distinction here between costumers and constituent groups.

The customer is the person who receives the service. Constituent groups often exert influence, but may not always accurately represent the needs of a program's real customers.

The second step is to identify and quantify our customers' needs. And the third is to put these needs into the context of the existing environment. How do elected officials rate these needs on their list of priorities? What can we do to meet the needs now with available funds? How can we restructure to be more effective? What incentives can we use to bring private enterprise or non-profit partners in to expand our resources? Can we somehow earn money, not just spend it?

Bob Houk has given you an outline of our vision for the future of GPO and the Depository Library Program. I am going to tell you about some of the things we are doing today.

We are putting our house in order. We will eliminate distribution backlogs this year. Then we will eliminate cataloging backlogs. We will connect ourselves to the Internet. We will complete data collection and analysis of five electronic pilot projects and issue a report. We have created within the document sales program a new electronic information dissemination service working closely with Federal agencies. During our contacts with agency publishers we will make them aware of the benefits they get by making electronic products available to depository libraries. And we will draft plans for a Federal information directory.

Although we are well into the electronic information era, there is no single Federal information policy, and ad hoc policies are springing up like daffodils. Electronic technology is evolving rapidly. And so are the electronic information needs of depository libraries.

In this environment, we cannot wait for the future. The future is now. Here is what we are doing:

- We are exploring the applications of various technologies.
- We are identifying the needs of our Federal agency customers.
- We are looking at the ways the public uses government information.
- And we are determining what can be achieved through cooperation with private sector and nonprofit information providers.

In undertaking this process, we are guided by three basic principles. The foundation principle, on which the other two rest, is that the public has paid for the creation of, and owns, government information. The second, underlying the Depository Library Program, is that the public is entitled to have some broadly based mechanism for free access to government publications. The third principle, which forms the basis of the sales program, is that if an individual wishes to own a copy of a government publication, it should be available at roughly the cost of supplying it. Thus, the sales and Depository Library Programs complement each other. And both provide essential alternatives for public access to government publications.

In this time of complex deal-making in the government information arena, these three principles sound a bit out-dated. But if we are to find our way out of the chaotic state into which information technologies have thrown us, we are going to have to go back to the basics. We are going to have to look to the essential tenets that have guaranteed the public access to the documents of its government. The National Commission on Library and Information Science did this in June 1990 by approving what they refer to as a "Bill of Rights for the Information Age." The preamble to that

document states that, " ... Public information is information owned by the people, held in trust by their government, and should be available to the people except where restricted by law."

Using these principles as our touchstones, we are setting out to define GPO's role by pursuing what I call "the practical policy of the possible." Our assumptions are that we cannot predict the final shape or timing of Federal information policy. That we cannot project with certainty the outcome of the myriad technical issues associated with electronic information dissemination. But that we do have the mandate to disseminate and provide public access to the entire range of government publications regardless of media.

The result of our efforts will be that when a comprehensive Federal information policy arrives, we will already be there. We will be offering agencies the full spectrum of electronic publishing services and offering the public convenient access to government information in all formats.

The best way we can protect and preserve the values we all share is to work closely together in shaping the future of the depository program. That is the purpose of this conference: to bring together depository librarians, Federal agency officials, and GPO staff in the spirit of renewed commitment to public service.

Thank you for joining us-- at this conference and in our quest for a meaningful future for the depository program.