

National Archives Embraces Greater Openness under the Leadership of U.S. Archivist Ferriero

WASHINGTON, D.C., September 2, 2010—In November 2009, AALL applauded the Senate's confirmation of David S. Ferriero as the 10th Archivist of the United States. Since his confirmation, Ferriero, a librarian by profession, has led the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) into a new era of greater openness. AALL is especially pleased that he has taken positive steps to promote public access to government information and address the federal government's lack of adequate e-records management.

During his first year as archivist, Ferriero has embraced the expansion of NARA's responsibilities to house two important newly created offices that promote government openness: the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS) and the National Declassification Center (NDC). OGIS, the *Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)* ombudsman office established by the *OPEN Government Act of 2007* (P.L. 110-175), is charged with mediating *FOIA* disputes, reviewing *FOIA* policies and procedures, and tracking agency compliance. Under the excellent leadership of Director Miriam Nisbet, OGIS has resolved 82 percent of the more than 330 cases it has handled since opening its doors in September 2009 with a meager \$1 million budget for its first year.

The OGIS website has become an important resource for information related to *FOIA*, linking to *FOIA* resources produced by the government as well as by nonprofits such as the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press. OGIS Director Miriam Nisbet also participated in program J1, "The Future of *FOIA*," at the 2010 AALL Annual Meeting in Denver, where she reported on some of the office's remarkable accomplishments. The administration has asked Congress to fund OGIS at \$3 million in FY 2011, a significant and much-needed increase.

The National Declassification Center was established by President Obama's December 2009 Executive Order on Classified National Security Information and began operations at NARA one month later. AALL strongly supported the creation of the NDC when it was originally proposed in the 1997 Moynihan Commission report on government secrecy, and in November 2008 AALL endorsed recommendations to the Obama-Biden Transition Team in support of its establishment.

The NDC has the vital task of preparing for public release of a backlog of more than 400 million pages by December 31, 2013, and training agency staff on classification policy. Since Sheryl Jasielum Shenberger's appointment in May 2010 as the first director of the NDC, the center has launched a blog, invited public comments on its draft prioritization plan, and issued its first status report. The report, released in June, stated that an impressive eight million pages of material had been processed and made available to the public during the NDC's first six months. Some of the most interesting releases include the recent electronic dockets of closed cases before the U.S. Supreme Court and State Department records related to economic affairs in many West African countries.

Further demonstrating Ferriero's commitment to open government, NARA released an Open Government Plan in April 2010, even though the agency was not required to do so. As part of its flagship initiative described in the plan, NARA is developing a new website, the Online Public Access (OPA) system, to provide improved access to its digital collections. The new system will provide federated searching across NARA's online systems, including the online catalog and Archives.gov. In August, I attended a meeting at NARA where agency staff updated us on the status of OPA. I was pleased to learn that the new system is scheduled to launch as a prototype in December 2010, at which point NARA will be looking for feedback from our community and members of the public.

In addition to regularly reaching out to open government groups, Ferriero has testified at several recent congressional hearings on federal e-records management. In June, the House Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on Information Policy, Census, and National Archives held a hearing at which Ferriero reported on the recent self-assessments of agency e-records management processes. He is very concerned that the self-assessments found that a troubling 79 percent of agencies have "moderate to high" levels of risk associated with their records management programs.

In July, the same committee held a hearing on agency use of social media. Ferriero discussed NARA's 2005 guidance on managing web records and the 2006 guidance on the use of new

web technologies, including RSS feeds, blogs, and wikis. Ferriero testified that NARA will be issuing a new "Bulletin on Web 2.0 and Social Media Platforms" this fall that will expand on how agencies' use of social media platforms may impact their e-records management. NARA is also currently conducting a study on federal agencies' use of Web 2.0 technologies to identify what kinds of records agencies are creating and their potential long-term value. The Government Accountability Office (GAO), whose director of information security issues testified at the same hearing, will also be issuing a report on agencies' use of social media in the near future.

Ferriero is also working with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to address serious concerns with the Electronic Records Archives (ERA). In response to the GAO's recent report detailing major shortcomings with the cost, schedule, and performance of the ERA, NARA has agreed to lead a government-wide meeting with the Federal CIO, OMB, agency CIOs, and Federal Records Officers. The archivist will also conduct a review of all statutes and regulations related to electronic records management to assess whether they need to be revised.

We have been monitoring the development of the ERA for many years and have been very concerned with the delays that have led to significant cost overruns, as reported by GAO and NARA's inspector general. We are pleased that Ferriero will be working with and regularly reporting to OMB to resolve these longstanding problems.

Ferriero has taken many important steps to increase openness at NARA, engage the open government community for our views related to access to public records, and address problems related to the lack of e-records management in the federal government. We will continue to track NARA's progress in meeting their mission as the "nation's record-keeper" and keep you updated as new developments occur. ■

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