Hype and Hope: Librarians Respond to a New Presidency

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The Questions

- What concerns were being expressed on Govdoc-L and ALATT as a new administration prepared to take office?
- Are some of the concerns over-hyped?
- What new information could be learned from these concerns?

A Snapshot Review of Concerns

- GOVDOC-L
- ALATT (Librarians' Think Tank)
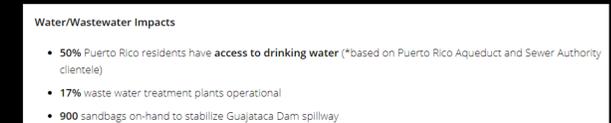- July, 2016 to January 2017

The Themes

- Web harvesting information
- Social media preservation
- Restriction of access to new information
- Reassertion of commitment to government access information
- There is much work to be done!

GOVDOC-L/ALATT CONCERNS EXPRESSED

- Concern:
  - How is information on government websites being archived when a new president takes office?
- Response:
  - End of Term Web Archive
  - Done in 2008 and 2012 – 16 and 21 terabytes respectively
  - Open nominations in 2016 – 11,382 nominations by 393 nominators, 30-40 terabytes expected
  - LOC, California Digital Library, University of North Texas, Internet Archive, George Washington University, Stanford, GPO

- Concern:
  - How are presidential tweets archived?
- Response:
  - NARA preserves social media, both official and disclosed private accounts.
  - LOC harvested President Trump's twitter account as part of a 2016 election collection.
  - George Washington University Libraries has a dataset of approximately 2080 million tweet ides related to the election.

- Concern:
  - Listserv posters expressed confusion about restrictions of the dissemination of information of the public (i.e., EPA, USDA, HHS, Interior, Energy, Transportation, NIH).
- Response:
  - Several posters asked for guidance on how to respond to concerned patrons.
  - Confirmation from EPA official on 1/25/17 that they were ordered not to update webpages or issue press releases.
  - Retraction of internal memo ordering cessation of public communication at the ARS in the USDA on 1/24/17.
  - USAIN recommendation to contact representatives
  - Reminder of the Sunlight Foundation's efforts to oppose limits on information.

Relevant GOVDOC-L Subject Strings
- Government websites as a reliable source of information 1/23/2017
- USDA Information, 1/24/2017
- Media freeze, Preibus memoranda and regulation freeze, 1/25/2017
- EPA article on NPR, 1/25/2017

• HYPE

- Concern:
  - What is happening to the datasets?

April 24 at 10:42am
http://www.independent.co.uk/.../donald-trump-epa-website-tur...

Donald Trump just completely deleted one of the government's most important websites
Donald Trump is to completely shut down one of the government's most important data services. The Environmental Protection Agency's Open Data Web service – ...
INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

- Response:
  - EPA's Open Data Web Service – pop-ups suggesting the site would shut down 4/28/17 may have been related to a potential government shut down rather than a notice the site would be eliminated.

No The EPA's Open Data Website Is Not Going Away - The Future Of Open Science Data
Reports that the EPA's open data website is shutting down Friday are just normal government shutdown bureaucracy and the site is not going anyway, but what can we learn about the future of scientific open data from this episode?
FORBES.COM

Like · Reply · 12 · April 24 at 11:18am

PERSPECTIVE

"While there are significant statutory problems with preserving digital U.S. Government information, I STRONGLY ENCOURAGE the depository community to refrain from the histrionic rhetoric present in recent days. The rhetoric over climate change resources is particularly silly! As Cabinet secretaries get confirmed (once Democratic Senators stop procedural procrastination) and other presidential appointments are made and established in their positions, the unending flood of government information and data will continue. Newly proposed rules are being published in the Federal Register and it is natural and desirable that the Trump Administration wants to seriously examine the necessity of many of these rules.

While we should seek to promote public access to government information for our users, we must not make the mistake of deifying it or assuming that the apocalypse is upon us if some government information is temporarily unavailable. Let's keep some historical perspective and recognize that life goes on regardless of the volume of government information available." Bert Chapman, Purdue, GOVDOC-L, 1/26/17, Quoted with Permission.

HOPE

- Concern:
  - What is happening to datasets?

- Response:
  - Save the datasets!
  - Data.gov: 195,245 public sets in February; 156,000 in late April/early May; 192,648 as of 5/16/17 (Washington Post, citing SMU law school Associate Dean of Research, Nathan Cortez
  - Data protection and recovery efforts underway at many libraries.

March 4 · HoustonChronicleCommunity
How I spent my day, today - many hands, saving federal datasets -

Librarians, 'hactivists' gather to secure federal data
Among other tasks, the agency deploys satellites that consistently scan the globe to record shifts in sea surface temperatures, brewing storms and even changes in sea ice conditions. Many of them believe that data is threatened...
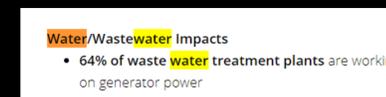HOUSTONCHRONICLE.COM

EXAMPLE OF RECENT CONCERNS

- FEMA Website changes: Updates on Puerto Rico recovery efforts scrub negative statistics

October 4, 2017 (Wayback Machine)

Water/Wastewater Impacts
- **50%** Puerto Rico residents have **access to drinking water** (*based on Puerto Rico Aqueduct and Sewer Authority clientele)
- **17%** waste water treatment plants operational
- **900** sandbags on-hand to stabilize Guajataca Dam spillway

October 6, 2017 (FEMA Website)

Water/Wastewater Impacts
- **64% of waste water treatment plants** are working on generator power

SOURCES/FOR MORE INFORMATION/HISTORIC PERSPECTIVE

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CONCLUSION

While changes to information availability are to be expected as presidential administrations change, and are not in and of themselves cause for undue alarm, librarians and archivists play a vital role in both preserving original content and data as well as raising awareness of changes in access.