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February 2, 2007

Senator Barbara Boxer
112 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510-0505

Dear Senator Boxer,

The Special Libraries Association (SLA), which represents information professionals in the global information society and librarians in corporate, academic, and government environments, is pleased to have an opportunity to provide written testimony to the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee regarding the proposed closure of the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) network of regional specialty libraries. Also, at the recommendation of Grant Cope, we are attaching questions for your consideration, which we hope may be of value to you during the Committee hearing on Tuesday, February 6.

SLA was the first library association to publicly denounce the proposed EPA closures, and the Association played a pivotal role in raising this important issue with you and your legislative colleagues. Further, we have encouraged our Association's 11,000 members who collect, analyze and disseminate information to facilitate accurate decision-making in the public and private sectors to communicate their views on this matter to their Congressional representatives.

We are particularly concerned about the effects the proposed closures will have, and are having, on the public's ability to access data and information necessary to scientists, policy makers and corporate entities to operate in the public good. We have heard from many SLA members in the scientific and medical community who have told us the closure of the EPA libraries will impact their work directly. While the loss of some libraries may be inevitable, our primary concern is the loss of access to the crucial information contained in these libraries, which could have devastating long-term impacts on public health and safety.

Many SLA members have special expertise in creating, organizing, disseminating and ensuring access to digital resources. They are gravely concerned about EPA's apparent lack of preparation and understanding of the sophisticated processes and procedures necessary to digitize and logically present an enormous body of information in a way that is easily accessible and usable by those who rely on it.

Also of particular concern to SLA are issues related to the authenticity of documents housed in EPA libraries that have or are being digitized, and may be required for legal purposes in the future. This is a separate issue from the destruction and disposal of documents that could be required in legal proceedings, which also is a very serious matter.

We look forward to providing you and the Committee with more detail about these issues when we provide our written testimony.

Thank you very much for your concern about and action on this important matter. If you need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Janice R. Lachance, CEO
Special Libraries Association

CC: Grant Cope

Questions Submitted by SLA for Consideration and Use by the Environment and Public Works Committee

Hearing on Oversight of Recent EPA Decisions

Tuesday, February 6, 2007

10:00 AM

- 1) Have you done a formal assessment of the impact the EPA library closures could have on human health and safety as well as business growth and development?
- 2) In designing EPA's plan to digitize its library collections, have you consulted with information professionals with best industry practices and procedures? And if so, whom?
- 3) Have you estimated the total cost of this digitization plan in the President's FY2007 Budget?
- 4) And what formal process have you established for the closures? And can you provide this plan to the Committee?
- 5) Have you sought counsel from the Department of Justice regarding potential issues related to digitization of documents and their use in future legal proceedings?
- 6) Can you tell the Committee exactly who uses your library services? For example, is it in-house EPA staff, scientists and researchers, members of the public, state and local government officials, academic researchers, etc.? If you have not, how can EPA develop a system to serve these various constituencies effectively?