

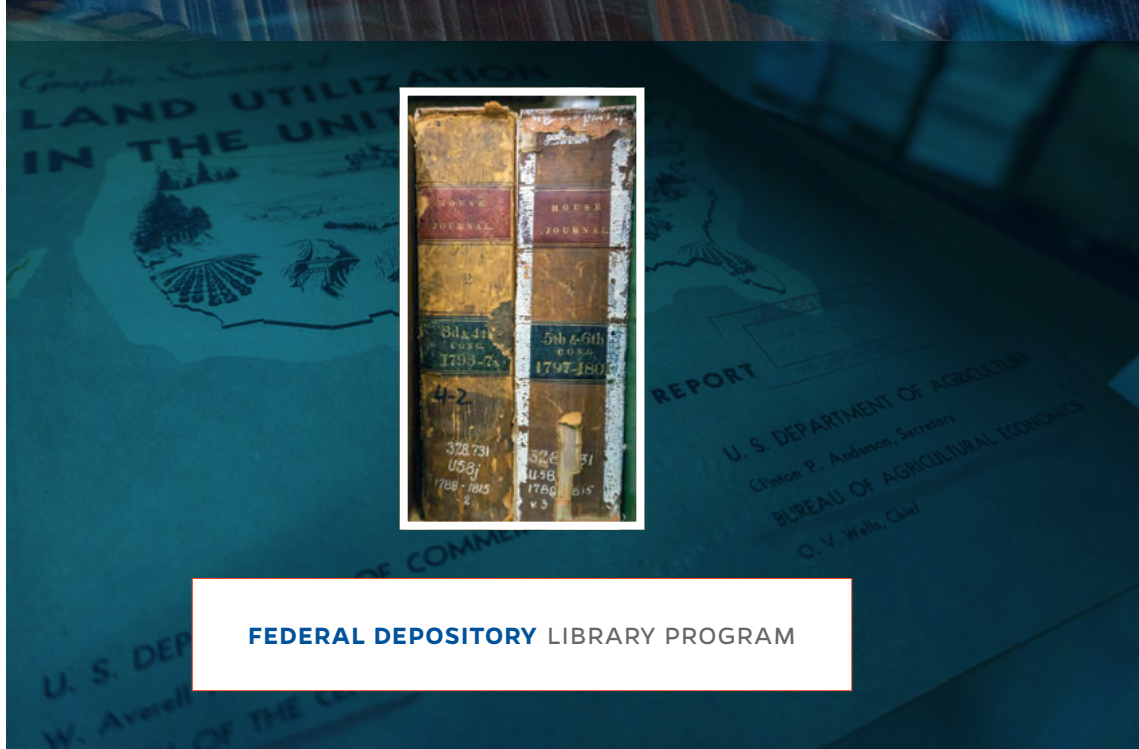


**“Shelf after shelf,  
stretching over a mile & a half,  
these unembellished books  
give no visual clues  
to their importance or value  
they have within.”**

- Sarah Erikson

*Erikson in the stacks of the University of Florida’s Regional Federal Depository Documents Collection located off campus and housed in the Auxiliary Library Facility.*





## FEDERAL DEPOSITORY LIBRARY PROGRAM

Author:

**Sarah Erikson,**

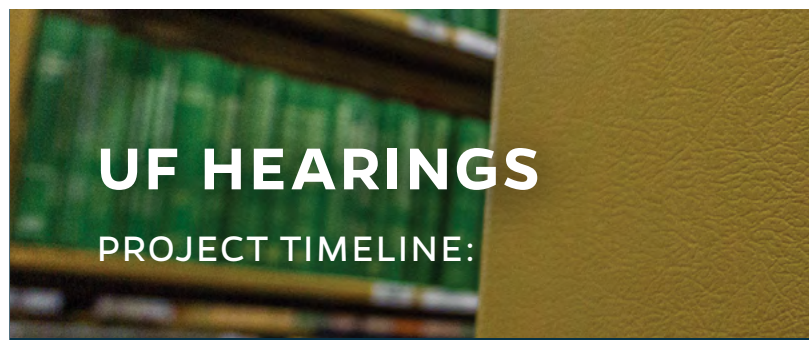
*Regional Government Documents Librarian*

**T**he University of Florida has provided stewardship for government documents since 1907. As part of the Federal Depository Library Program, the Smathers Libraries provides access to millions of items that openly record the activities of the federal government and inform the public. In 1962, Senator Spessard Holland designated the University of Florida as a Regional Depository Library; as such, it provides expertise and leadership, and collects everything that the government publishes. There have been four previous regional government documents librarians in the UF Libraries, averaging a dozen years of service in the role. Currently, Sarah Erikson serves in that role, coordinating with libraries throughout Florida, Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands, and liaising with the US Government Publishing Office.

[ufdc.ufl.edu/source](https://ufdc.ufl.edu/source)



When Erekson first started working in government documents two decades ago, a colleague noted that it was the “ugliest” part of the library because the books all look the same. United States Congressional Hearings may look monotonous: there are a lot of them, they are the same size, and have the same kind of cover. On shelf after shelf, stretching over a mile and a half, these unembellished books give no visual clues to their importance or value they have within. Yet in them, a reader might find the inquiry into the sinking of the *Titanic*; testimony of Mr. Fred Rogers about funding programs for children; or the Florida Hurricane Disaster: Hearings before the Committee on World War Veterans’ Legislation, House of Representatives, Seventy-fourth Congress, Second Session on H.R.9486: a Bill for the Relief of Widows, Children and Dependent Parents of World War Veterans who Died as the Result of the Florida Hurricane at Windley Island and Matecumbe Keys, September 2, 1935.



## UF HEARINGS PROJECT TIMELINE:

### 1 Becomes an ASERL Cooperative Federal Depository Program, Center of Excellence for Congressional Hearings:



- regional commitment (Libraries in the Southeast)
- able to obtain sets in better condition (i.e., rainbow of buckram bindings)
- claim “needs” using the ASERL disposition database (UF-hosted database)

### 2 Agrees to be a Government Publishing Office (GPO) Preservation Steward for Congressional Hearings:



- national commitment to retain
- contribute digitized versions
- catalog collection
- retain print in a shared repository (FLARE)



HEARINGS

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON

WORLD WAR VETERANS' LEG

HOUSE OF REPRESENTAT

SEVENTY-FOURTH CON

SECOND SESSION

ON

H. R. 9486

A BILL FOR THE RELIEF OF WIDOWS,

AND DEPENDENT PARENTS OF WORLD WAR

VETERANS AS THE RESULT OF THE FLORIDA

DISASTER OF 1935, AND FOR THE BENEFIT OF

SMATHERS ISLAND AND MATECUM

SEPTEMBER 2, 1935

Printed for the use of the  
Committee on World War Veterans' Leg



People might think that such an essential piece of democracy would be easy to access, complete, and available in many geographic locations throughout the country. The answer to the questions “What has Congress done?” or “What is Congress doing?” should not require an advanced degree in computer science to find or a trip to Fort Knox to access. In the case of the Florida Hurricane Disaster of 1935, the federal government had sent 25,000 World War I veterans to camps in Florida for “reconditioning.” After a storm directly hit the camps, killing more than 250 veterans, Congress needed to investigate what happened and determine the appropriate response. The hearing included: text of legislation providing for relief to the widows and orphans, testimony of forecasters

from the Weather Bureau, witnesses who experienced the storm, and veterans working for the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. These provide vital insights for those studying how to make better disaster preparations, or the history of meteorology. Additionally, these essential resources support the general public, as with people reconstructing family histories, or graphing government payouts for disaster relief over time. Whether for those interested in reviewing government actions or relying on the government to preserve something of value, the information should be readily available to every citizen in every congressional district in the country. But it is not.



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**3** Catalogs the uncataloged:  
• 90k+ new records  
• most comprehensive cataloged collection



**4** Commits to sharing with University of Georgia:  
• Re-interpretation of Title 44 United States Code, meant GPO wanted more collaboration across state lines  
• ASERL Centers of Excellence in Florida (hearings) and Georgia (maps) meant we could share collections that were burdensome (space and cataloging) but already had significant institutional investment.  
• Senator Kelly Loeffler and Senator Marco Rubio approved Smathers Libraries as a shared regional depository library with UGA Libraries (July 2020). This will provide easier access to more comprehensive Federal resources for residents of Florida, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Georgia.



This is because of natural and man-made disasters, technological changes in printing and publishing, and an avalanche of materials coming faster than institutions have resources to process. Even with a web of libraries participating throughout the country, no one could claim to have a complete set of government publications. The depository program was designed around states and congressional districts, so interstate collaboration was limited. But led by Dean of Libraries Judith Russell, UF pushed forward the idea that government information is a national collection—no one library could or should have everything, but working together, each one having a part, we can come closer to the goal of comprehensiveness. In 2006, the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries enhanced collaborative efforts to create comprehensive collections within the eleven state region, without redundancy. The University of Florida Libraries committed to becoming a “Center of Excellence” for the U.S. Congressional Hearings. Because of the size and complexity of these materials (remember a mile and a half), this was an ambitious undertaking. While statistics prior to the 2011 implementation are anecdotal, suffice it to say that very few missing hearings were obtained. With a new tool, built and hosted by the UF Libraries, the Libraries acquired missing Congressional Hearings. Approximately 250 Hearings were obtained from other libraries in the Southeast.

Furthermore, hundreds of libraries across the country had been receiving printed Congressional Hearings since the 1800s. The sheer amount meant that most libraries did not provide the basic information that is expected of a library – having a record of what it is and where you can find it. Instead, most relied on specialized librarians to be finding aids. Over the course of five years, the UF Government Documents Cataloging Team processed each of the 91,546 hearings in the Smathers Libraries collection. Even though none of these were considered “hard to find,” the Cataloging team had to create many original records—no other library in the world had made a record of the hearing! The hearings weren’t rare, they were just rarely cataloged.

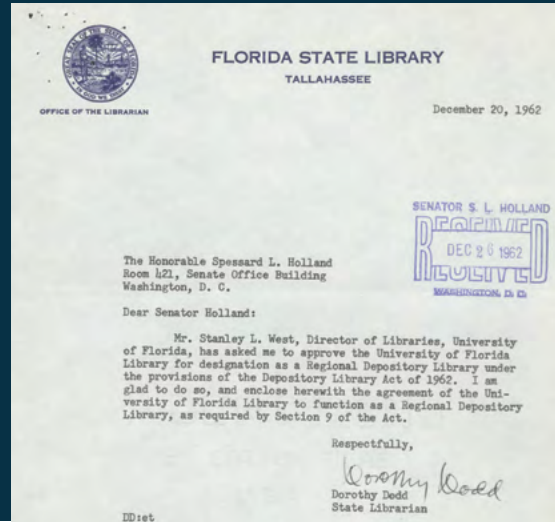
The volume of U.S. Congressional Hearings was not the only barrier to providing greater access. They are also some of the most complex or cumbersome books to catalog. A reader may remember a hearing’s short title, like the Florida Hurricane Disaster; but to provide searchable and accurate records, all 54 words of that title have to be transcribed. It takes not just expertise but a certain gusto to catalog nearly one hundred thousand books. Luckily, the UF Government Documents Cataloging Team had the right stuff. After this project, everyone can discover the full content of the hearings: the names of the committee members and witnesses, text of the bill, testimony of witnesses, supporting documentation such as letters or newspaper articles.

The UF Libraries, home to six Senate collections in the P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, became the most comprehensive and discoverable collection of U.S. Congressional Hearings in the country.

[www.library.ufl.edu/spec/pkyonge](http://www.library.ufl.edu/spec/pkyonge)



The University of Florida Libraries was one of the first institutions in the country to commit to leadership when it comes to assurances that government information would be accessible and available in perpetuity. First, as a Regional Depository Library. Then by leading the Southeastern Research Libraries to collaborate and prioritize resources. And now by devoting dedicated and expert staff to catalog the Congressional Hearings and more.



Check out a sampling of past hearings, many still relevant today.

<http://guides.uflib.ufl.edu/ufdocuments>

- 1997 Technology in the classroom : panacea or Pandora's box?  
**Y 4.SCI 2:105/13**
- 2003 Smooth sailing or an impending wreck? : the impact of new visa & passport requirements.  
**Y 4.G 74/7:V 82/3**
- 2003 U.S. borders : safe or sieve?  
**Y 4.F 49:S.HRG.108-24**
- 2004 Handoff or fumble? : are DOD and VA providing seamless health care coverage to transitioning veteran.  
**Y 4.V 64/3:108-26**
- 2005 Geospatial information : are we headed in the right direction, or are we lost?  
**Y 4.G 74/7:G 29/3**
- 2009 United States Trustee Program : watchdog or attack dog?  
**Y 4.J 89/1:110-161**
- 2009 Pakistani elections : will they be free and fair or fundamentally flawed?  
**Y 4.G 74/7:110-130**
- 2011 Ready-to-eat or not? : examining the impact of leafy greens marketing agreements.  
**Y 4.G 74/7:111-126**
- 2017 Prudent planning or wasteful binge? : a look at the end of the year spending.  
**Y 4.G 74/9:S.HRG.114-127**