



**Remarks by Carla Hayden
14th Librarian of Congress
Swearing-In Ceremony
September 14, 2016**

Thank you Senator Mikulski for your kind introduction. Your 39 years of service to the State of Maryland and to the United States Congress is a shining example of dedicated public service. I am extremely grateful for your personal friendship that has meant so much to me.

Mr. Speaker, I am honored by your remarks and your presence here today. Your commitment to the nation through public service and your respect and admiration for this Library are so appreciated by the staff and especially by me.

Mr. Chief Justice, there is no greater distinction than to be sworn in by you as Librarian of Congress. I want to thank you for your regard for this institution and its role as a source of knowledge and information for the country.

I would also like to acknowledge Chairman Blunt and the Joint Committee on the Library – the oldest continuing joint committee of the United States Congress. Your belief in the Library’s mission builds on the steadfast and historic partnership between Congress and its Library. Thank you for your continued support.

I must admit that it is hard for me to imagine the little eight-year-old girl with pigtails, who checked out "Bright April" over and over until the fines came in, is standing here today. It feels like yesterday when I began my career at a store front branch of the Chicago Public Library and watched Judy Zucker on the floor leading story time for children with autism. Watching her interact with the children and in turn seeing their reactions demonstrated the power and potential of a librarian’s work.

Forty years later, it is an honor to be nominated by President Obama and confirmed by the United States Senate to lead one of the greatest institutions of our nation, and of the world. I am truly grateful and humbled by this selection.

Some have noted that I am making history, as the first woman, and the first African-American, in this post, and that is true. Library pioneer Melville Dewey often encouraged women to enter the profession because they can, quote, “bear pain” and could perform “monotonous tasks without boredom.” And poignantly people of my race were once punished with lashes and worse for learning to read. As a descendent of people who were denied the right to read, to now have the opportunity to serve and lead the institution that is our national symbol of knowledge, is a historic moment.

So many people have been part of my journey – family, friends and colleagues, many of them here today, too numerous to mention all by name. But I thank all of you for the life lessons you’ve taught me and memories we share, all of which have shaped my experience.

I do want to thank my mother, who - among many other gifts - introduced me to reading, music and public service. It is very special that she is here today as I embark on a new chapter that brings all of those passions together.

To have her join me on stage and hold the bible that belonged to Abraham Lincoln was a special moment for us. My family is from Illinois, and many of them are buried in the same cemetery as the 16th president.

I want to thank the United States Congress, for building and sustaining this Library. I appreciate seeing so many of you here today, from both houses and both parties. This Library is your library, and its service to Congress remains its core mission.

The Library is also one of the greatest gifts and legacies the Congress has given to the American people. The vision of a national library to serve Members of Congress and the communities they represent continues the legacy of my 13 predecessors. Over time these leaders have expanded the scope of materials collected, advocated successfully to bring the federal copyright system here and one-by-one overseen construction of the facilities necessary to house and preserve the collections and the services offered here.

For over two centuries, each librarian's experiences and contributions reflected the country's social and historical landscape and have advanced the progress of this library.

The sixth Librarian of Congress Ainsworth Rand Spofford famously called it "the book palace of the American people" when this building opened in 1897. But the Library of Congress is so much more than beautiful architecture wrapped around bookshelves.

It is in fact, the second part of Spofford's quote – used less often – that is truly powerful. He called it "the book palace of the American people in which you all have equal rights with me ... in which the works of all of you will be welcomed and forever preserved."

The eighth Librarian of Congress Herbert Putnam described the Library as "a service outside of the limits of Washington. It is indeed a service to the country at large."

The 13th Librarian of Congress believed wholeheartedly in that idea. Dr. James Billington often talked of "getting the champagne out of the bottle." And he made significant progress. I am touched that he is here today, as Librarian of Congress Emeritus, with his wonderful wife Marjorie. I want to offer you a whole-hearted thank you for your service and the strong legacy you've created.

I'd also like to take a moment to acknowledge Deputy Librarian of Congress David Mao and the senior staff of the Library, who are making my transition into this post well-informed and as smooth as it could be. The stewardship of this team on behalf of the library is a shining example of the

human assets our nation is so well-served by, in the federal service. The staff of the Library of Congress believes in this institution and feels honored, as I do, to serve.

Today, through the power of technology, thousands around the country are able to watch this ceremony live. This is the opportunity to build on the contributions of the Librarians who have come before, to realize a vision of a national library that reaches outside the limits of Washington.

When I contemplate the potential of harnessing that power of technology with the unparalleled resources at the Library of Congress, I am overwhelmed with the possibilities.

These resources include more than 162 million items on nearly 840 miles of bookshelves. If you stretched those bookshelves from Washington, DC, along our interstate system, you could travel all the way to Davenport, Iowa, before reaching the end.

This Library holds some of the world's largest collections from maps to comic books; founding documents like Thomas Jefferson's handwritten draft of the Declaration of Independence; the full papers of 23 presidents, and the works of eminent Americans such as Samuel Morse, Frederick Douglass, Clara Barton, Leonard Bernstein, Bob Hope and Thurgood Marshall.

What is the possibility for those treasures? How are they relevant today?

I am reminded of a moment during the unrest in the City of Baltimore in April 2015. The Pennsylvania Avenue Branch library was located in the center of those events. But I made the decision to keep the library open, to provide a safe place for our citizens to gather. I was there, hand in hand with the staff, as we opened the doors every morning.

Cars were still smoldering in the streets. Closed signs were hanging in storefronts for blocks. But people lined up outside the doors of the library.

I remember in particular a young girl coming up to me and asking, “What’s the matter? What is everyone so upset about?” She came to the library for sanctuary and understanding.

I recently had the opportunity to view one of the latest Library of Congress acquisitions – the Rosa Parks Collection – which includes her family bible, the bible she carried in her purse, and her handwritten letters. In one such letter she reflects on her December 1, 1955 arrest, writing, “I had been pushed around all my life and felt at this moment that I couldn’t take it anymore.”

That letter – and all of her papers – are now digitized and available online. So anyone anywhere can read her words in her own handwriting. Read them in the classrooms of Racine, Wisconsin, in a small library on a reservation in New Mexico, and even in the library of a young girl in Baltimore, looking around as her city is in turmoil.

That is a real public service. And a natural next step for this nation’s library, a place where you can touch history and imagine your future.

This Library of Congress, a historic reference source for Congress, an established place for scholars, can also be a place where we grow scholars, where we inspire young authors, where we connect with those individuals outside the limits of Washington and help them make history themselves.

How do we accomplish this?

By building on a legacy that depends so much on the people in this room. Not only the elected officials, who have quite a bit to say about the direction of this institution, but also the staff of the Library of Congress, my new colleagues, here on the mezzanine, watching in the Madison Hall, the Adams Café and the Montpelier Room; watching in Culpeper at the Packard Campus for audio/visual conservation; and watching at the National Library Services for the Blind and Physically Handicapped.

Public service has been such a motivating factor for me, in my life and my career. When I received the call from the White House about this opportunity, and was asked, “Will you serve?” Without hesitation I said “yes.” Throughout my career I have known the staff of the Library of Congress to be a dedicated and enthusiastic group of public servants. I look forward to working with you for years to come.

But we cannot do it alone. I am calling on you, both who are here in person and those watching virtually, that to have a truly national library, an institution of opportunity for all: it is the responsibility of all.

That means collaborating with other institutions. That means private sector support and patriotic philanthropy for necessary projects like digitization. That means starting a new dialogue about connectivity to classrooms and other libraries.

I cannot wait to work with all of you to seize this moment in our history. Let's make history at the Library of Congress together. Thank you.

