

# PLG Progressive Librarians Guild Bulletin

Volume 2, Issue 10

October 2013

## Progressive Librarians Guild Statement on Open the Government.org

The letter below was sent to the Progressive Librarians Guild Coordinating Committee by Open the Government (OTG) for co-sponsorship. PLG co-sponsors and supports many OTG statements and sign-ons, but this time we declined. The issue the open letter addresses, secret laws and legal interpretations governing U.S. surveillance and espionage activity, is indeed important, but the PLG-CC decided it could not endorse the weakly framed letter to President Obama as written by OTG.

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-----Original Message-----

From: Amy Bennett

Sent: Oct 18, 2013 9:23 PM

This is a reminder to email me ([abennett@openthegovernment.org](mailto:abennett@openthegovernment.org)) by Monday, October 21 at 10 am to add your organization to the below letter urging President Obama to pledge to curb secret law in the US ' new round of Open Government Partnership (OGP) commitments scheduled to be delivered in London later this month. Current signatories are included.

Learn more about the OGP here: <http://www.opengovpartnership.org/>

-Amy

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Dear President Obama:

On behalf of citizens who support an open and accountable government, we are writing to urge you to pledge as part of the US' new round of Open Government Partnership commitments to curb the secret law that enabled the National Security Agency's surveillance programs to become much broader and more invasive than it was believed the law allowed.

As you well know, secret legal interpretations by the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) and the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court allowed the NSA's surveillance programs to grow in ways that raise serious concerns about what the government is doing in our name and the extent of violations of American's privacy and civil liberties. Documents released to the media about the NSA's programs further raise critical questions about the scope of the US' activities abroad, leading the President of Brazil and others to question whether the US' programs breach international law.

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## **Progressive Librarians Guild Statement on Open the Government.org (continued)**

This is not the first time that abuses of power have occurred when a government program operates in a bubble of secrecy with only limited oversight: similarly, Americans were outraged to learn that memos authored by the OLC during the Bush Administration approved interrogation methods that many equate to torture. Your release of these memos demonstrated a respect for the public's right to know how the government interprets the law. Making a concrete commitment to the public's right to legal interpretations would make this respect part of the administration's legacy. While the government has an absolute obligation to protect properly and appropriately classified information, democracy does not thrive when our national security programs and the intelligence community's actions are shrouded in secrecy. The public must, at the very least, have a shared understanding of the bounds and limits of our laws and be able to have an informed debate about our policies.

During the meeting of the Open Government Partnership in London, you have a unique opportunity to address this issue head-on on an international stage. By committing to give the public access to documents that significantly interpret laws, including – but not limited to—the Department of Justice's legal interpretations and opinions by the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISC), you can both address domestic concerns about our surveillance programs, and begin to rebuild trust with our international partners.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this issue of critical importance to transparent and accountable government. To discuss these issues in greater detail, please contact Patrice McDermott, Executive Director of OpenTheGovernment.org, [atpmdermott@openthegovernment.org](mailto:atpmdermott@openthegovernment.org) or 202-332-6736.

Sincerely,

ARTICLE 19

Californians Aware

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington – CREW

Electronic Frontier Foundation

Electronic Privacy Information Center – EPIC

First Amendment Foundation

Government Accountability Project – GAP

James Madison Project

Liberty Coalition

National Coalition Against Censorship

OpenTheGovernment.org

PolitiHacks

Project On Government Oversight – POGO

Sunlight Foundation

Tully Center for Free Speech at Syracuse University

Washington Civil Rights Council

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## **Progressive Librarians Guild Statement on Open the Government.org (continued)**

Dear Amy Bennett,

We feel that the Obama administration needs to be forcefully admonished for its continuing violations of law under the cloak of government secrecy, practices which, while the administration professes commitment to openness, have not only continued unabated but have proliferated and become more egregious and which, moreover, are justified, rationalized and/or covered-up by administration spokespersons.

We feel that operating under the pretense that the administration is truly committed to openness, in light of recent revelations as well as past history, and needs only to be "urged" to "curb" practices like secret laws and legal interpretations, is to provide cover for a regime of actual, on-going violations of the most basic rights not only of US citizens but of the international community through surveillance, data collection, and secret operations.

While, of course, we support the idea of ending the secret laws and legal interpretations which are inconsistent with any meaningful notion of "transparency" in democratic governance, we feel it is too tepid a response to the recent revelations of the governments virtually unchecked and cynical behavior. It does not help to allow, as Patrice McDermott does, that "the government has an absolute obligation to protect properly and appropriately classified information." An "absolute obligation" is very strong indeed while "properly and appropriately classified" is a weak concept when, as we know, the government always believes its information is "properly and appropriately" kept secret.

Hoping that you understand our reservations,  
Coordinating Committee, Progressive Librarians Guild

## **PLG London Presentation at FIMS Graduate Conference**

On October 5th, several members of PLG London (Rachel Burke, Joanna Kerr, Graham Lockhart, and Ali Versluis) presented "You Go to School for That?!: Contemporary Issues in Library and Information Science Education" at the 2013 Faculty of Information and Media Studies Graduate Conference at the University of Western Ontario. The presenters discussed the origin and evolution of LIS education, the tension between theory and practice, and the value of online education, interrogating how these forces speak with or against the current state of the profession. The presentation had an impressive turn out, with approximately 65 attendees representing the graduate, doctoral, and alumni populations of FIMS.

### ***Translation of *Questioning Library Neutrality: Essays from Progressive Librarian* Published***

The book *Questioning Library Neutrality: Essays from Progressive Librarian* has been translated into Japanese by the Kyoto University Graduate School of Education, which houses their library science program. You can see an image of the cover on Library Juice Press's website: <http://libraryjuicepress.com/blog/?p=4266> .

*Questioning Library Neutrality* was originally published by Library Juice Press. The book consists of revised articles from PLG's journal and was edited by PLG member Alison Lewis. It was originally published in 2008.

### ***Progressive Librarian Issue #41 Published***

Issue #41 of *Progressive Librarian* has been published and copies have been mailed out to members. The table of contents for this issue can be found on our website at: [http://progressivelibrariansguild.org/PL\\_Jnl/contents41.shtml](http://progressivelibrariansguild.org/PL_Jnl/contents41.shtml)

One of the articles from this issue, "Situating the Customer: The Genealogy of Customer Language in Libraries" by Susan Maret and Ben Eagle, will be translated into Spanish and made available at: <http://bitacoradeunbibliotecario.blogspot.com.es/>.

Thanks to the team at St. Catherine University for their hard work distributing this and all other issues to our members.

Have an update you'd like to see included in next month's bulletin?

Send it to [sarahbarriage@gmail.com](mailto:sarahbarriage@gmail.com)