

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 12, 2019

Dr. Carla Hayden  
Librarian of Congress  
101 Independence Ave., S.E.  
Washington, DC 20540

Dear Dr. Hayden:

As we approach Constitution Day, we write to you this with the words attributed to Thomas Jefferson in mind: “It is every Americans' right and obligation to read and interpret the Constitution for himself.”

Since 1913, the Library of Congress has authored, and the Government Publishing Office (GPO) has published, *The Constitution of the United States of America: Analysis and Interpretation*, or simply, the *Constitution Annotated*. This treatise is an invaluable resources for congressional staff, scholars, students, and other individuals interested in how the U.S. Supreme Court has interpreted our nation’s governing document. We write to encourage you to modernize how the Library of Congress makes the *Constitution Annotated* available to the public.

The Library of Congress already makes the *Constitution Annotated* available to members of Congress and their staff via an internal website. This internal version is relatively accessible and user-friendly with individual webpages for different sections of the document. Unfortunately, the public facing version is not so lucid. While we are pleased that the *Constitution Annotated* has been made publicly available since 2013 as an iPhone app, we have two concerns with the current state of affairs. First, the app, as well as the Library of Congress website, displays the contents of the *Constitution Annotated* – which when last published as a book exceeded 2,700 pages – as a slew of PDF pages. It is tough to read a short PDF on a phone’s tiny screen; for a document longer than the average Bible it is impossible. Second, the *Constitution Annotated* app is not available on non-Apple mobile devices.

We believe all Americans should have access to this incredible resource. We urge you to publish the *Constitution Annotated* to the public in the same manner it is made available to Congress – as a series of web pages that are continually updated and viewable on multiple devices. In addition, we ask that you consider publishing the *Constitution Annotated* to the public as a continuously updated structured data file, such as the XML format in which it is prepared. In particular, this will empower researchers and students to learn from the information it contains.

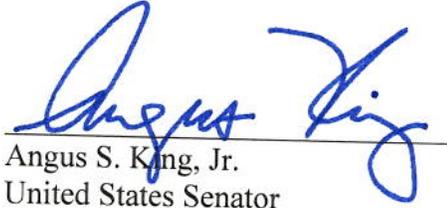
In 1833, Representative (and later Senator) Rufus Choate noted that “We have built no national temples but the Capitol; we consult no common oracle but the Constitution.” The “We” refers not to elected and appointed officials, but rather serves as shorthand for the Preamble’s beginning – “We” as in “The People.” It is only possible for citizens to consult our common oracle if they have access. We ask that you commit to provide such access to the *Constitution*

*Annotated* as soon as possible. Thank you for your service to the Library of Congress, and your attention to this request.

Sincerely,



Rob Portman  
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator