

House Votes to Limit Powers of First Black Librarian of Congress

By Lauren Victoria Burke (NNPA Newswire Contributor)



Carla Hayden was appointed the 14th Librarian of Congress by President Barack Obama on Feb. 24, 2016.

In a vote of 378 to 48, the House passed legislation to take power away from the current Librarian of Congress, Dr. Carla Hayden.

The legislation, H.R. 1695, was authored by House Judiciary Chairman Bob Goodlatte (R-Va.) and ranking member John Conyers (D-Mich.), would limit the powers of the librarian. It is expected to pass the Senate and be signed into law by President Trump.

The bill makes the head of the Copyright Office, the Register of Copyrights, a presidential appointment that would have to be confirmed by the Senate, rather than an appointment by the Librarian of Congress, as it has been since 1870. The bill also limits the position of Register of Copyrights to a ten-year term.

The bill text reads, "This bill amends federal copyright law to require the President, with the advice and consent of the Senate, to appoint a Register of Copyrights from a list of at least three individuals..." and, "The bill limits the term

of office for the Register of Copyrights to 10 years, but the individual may be reappointed subject to the same requirements established in this bill. The President may remove the Register of Copyrights from office and must notify both chambers of Congress of any such removal."

According to the Library Journal, as President Obama considered his choice to fill the Librarian of Congress position in 2015, the Republican-controlled U.S. Senate passed a bill to limit the term of that position to ten years. "After [the bill] was approved in the House of Representatives," President Obama signed it into law on November 5, 2015.

The previous Librarian

of Congress, James Billington, served in the position for 28 years.

President Barack Obama appointed Hayden the 14th Librarian of Congress on February 24, 2016. She is the first African American to hold the position, as well as the first woman to be the Librarian of Congress, in the agency's history. On March 23, legislation was introduced to block Hayden from appointing the next Register of Copyrights. That legislation passed the House on April 26.

Supporters of the bill argued that the legislation would help to modernize the Copyright Office and make

it more accountable to Congress. Attempts to contact the office of Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) for details on why he au-

wood."

The entertainment industry pushed hard for the passage of H.R. 1695. It's likely that the selec-

“President Donald Trump would, in essence, run the Copyright Office

tioned H.R. 1695, were not answered.

"This bill serves no purpose other than to take power away from the Librarian of Congress and give it to powerful lobbyists, who will have a major say in who runs the Copyright Office," wrote Michael Masnick on TechDirt.com on April 26. "It's a bad bill, and it's a gift to Holly-

tion of the Librarian of Congress will be the focus of attention of the power of the entertainment lobby moving forward now that senators will play a role in confirmation.

The bill to limit Hayden's power arrives six months after she removed Maria Pallante from the position of Register of Copyrights in Oc-

tober 2016. Many in the entertainment industry were said to be unhappy with Pallante's removal.

"The Library of Congress, through the Registrar of Copyrights, plays a referee or umpire role in this complex new game; librarians, because they curate and compile content, have traditionally been protectors of copyright and works of authors and artists and balanced public and cultural interests in the free flow and use of that content," Christopher Chambers, a professor of media studies at Georgetown University told NBC BLK. "Big

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