
Write a letter—change a law

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A new generation of academic letter writers is needed.

As librarians, we are all conscious of the power of the printed word. In the 15 months since I moved to Washington, D.C., however, the value of the written word has taken on a new connotation for me. I have been reminded of its power when it is in the form of a letter to a Senator or Representative from a constituent. Politicians pay attention to relatively few influences when they are deciding how they will stand on an issue. They pay attention to their staff. Most of them pay attention to their party leaders. They pay attention to the people and organizations who taken on a new campaign. They pay attention to well-known or powerful lobbyists. And they pay attention to their mail.

Letters from individuals carry a particular and powerful kind of clout. The key to the clout is individuality. Letters that explain exactly how the legislation under discussion affects the operations and services of an academic library in their state or district have a pretty fair chance of winding up on the politician's desk. Nearly all politicians review at least some of their constituents' letters and many review all of them.

The letters let the politicians know that constituents are concerned about an issue and also serve another equally important function. They educate the politician—and, very importantly, his/her staff members—about issues of concern to academic librarians. Even with the help of capable professional staff, with the support of the various research arms of the Senate and the House, with the reams of information they get daily from lobbyists, a legislator's most urgent need is for information—for the facts and the ramifications which can 1) give them the knowledge they need to

decide intelligently on the issue, and 2) the rationale they need for the decision they finally make.

So what?

You may think Potomac Fever has gripped me in the form of strong urges to deliver elementary civics lessons. However, according to Eileen Cooke, Director of the ALA Washington Office, academic librarianship needs a new generation of letter writers. That's understandable when you consider that data from a 1984 survey indicated that 46% of ACRL members had been ACRL members for five years or less.

Taking the responsibility for becoming knowledgeable about legislative issues and writing letters describing their local impact are a way that each ACRL member can support the broader legislative work of ACRL and ALA. As all of you know, ACRL has an active Legislation Committee which has made significant contributions to the legislative process—most recently in developing and recommending the "need criteria" which may allow funding to be available again for Title II-A of the Higher Education Act.

The ALA Washington Office arranges witnesses for Congressional hearings, helps with testimony, and briefs witnesses on what to expect. The office works with ALA legislative networks and library constituents of key legislators. When AT&T proposed a private line tariff increase which would have meant increases in telecommunications costs averaging 73%, the ALA Washington Office spearheaded the formation of a coalition of library organizations, networks, and bibliographic utili-

ties which pooled resources and hired technological expertise. This improved information base enabled coalition members such as ALA to participate formally in complex FCC proceedings and mount a campaign of letters to the FCC and Congress. The result was a delayed and much less drastic increase. Each month, Carol Henderson of the Washington Office writes the "Washington Hotline" column for *C&RL News*.

But the needs of academic librarianship will be most effectively told with the help which only dozens—or better, hundreds—of letters can provide. Academic librarians can choose to make their professional contributions by telling the story as only individuals working in the field can tell it.

Why now?

There are several issues before Congress now on which letter writers could concentrate, but the following are perhaps the crucial ones:

The Higher Education Act reauthorization. Many parts of this Act affect academic and research libraries, and Title II is the only piece of Federal legislation aimed specifically at such libraries. Each year the Reagan Administration has recommended elimination of Title II. Congress has continued to fund II-B and II-C, although II-A funding was discontinued pending development of need criteria.

Title II-A need criteria have been proposed by the joint efforts of the ACRL Legislation Committee, ALA, and the Association of Research Libraries. Depending on the ultimate level of funding, the amendments they propose will provide for meaningful grants of \$2,000–\$10,000 for the most needy academic libraries—up to half of all institutions. Since 1966, the II-A college library resources program has provided over \$196 million for books, periodicals, and other materials. The maintenance of effort requirement often helped librarians persuade college administrators not to cut budgets in lean years or risk being ineligible for a Federal grant.

Title II-B has, since 1966, provided over \$30 million in library science training for over 4,000 individuals. II-B is a critical source of support for minority recruitment; since 1973, 70% of fellowships were awarded to minorities. II-B has also provided \$25 million for research and demonstrations, ranging from an important grant to OCLC in an early and critical stage in its development to the recent Department of Education Report, "Alliance for Excellence: Librarians Respond to 'A Nation at Risk,'" which was the subject of the ACRL President's Program in 1984.

Title II-C (strengthening research library resources program) has, since 1978, provided \$46.8 million for projects in 96 different research libraries. Its benefits extend far beyond these 96 libraries, because it ensures that the most significant research collections are part of the national network of interlibrary lending, as well as supporting

Key legislators for the 99th Congress

A good way to keep key committee and subcommittee chairs informed about library issues without imposing on them the burden of responding to letters from outside their home territory is to write to your own Representative and Senators, and send a copy to the key legislators on that issue. Chairs and ranking minority members on selected library issues are listed below:

For basic library legislation, HEA, LSCA, NCLIS, WHCLIS, etc.—House Postsecondary Education Subcommittee, Washington, DC 20515: Rep. William D. Ford (D-MI), Chairman; Rep. E. Thomas Coleman (R-MO), ranking minority member.

Senate Education, Arts, and Humanities Subcommittee, Washington, DC 20510: Sen. Robert T. Stafford (R-VT), Chairman; Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-RI), ranking minority member.

For postal legislation—House Post Office and Civil Service Committee, Washington, DC 20515: Rep. William D. Ford (D-MI), Chairman; Rep. Gene Taylor (R-MO), ranking minority member.

Senate Civil Service, Post Office, & General Services Subcommittee, Washington, DC 20510: Sen. Ted Stevens (R-AK), Chairman; Sen. Albert Gore, Jr. (D-TN), ranking minority member.

For funding of HEA, LSCA, NCLIS, WHCLIS, etc.—House Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee, Washington, DC 20515: Rep. William H. Natcher (D-KY), Chairman; Rep. Silvio O. Conte (R-NA), ranking minority member.

Senate Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee, Washington, DC 20510: Sen. Lowell P. Weicker, Jr. (R-CT), Chairman; Rep. William Proxmire (D-WI), ranking minority member; also, the Chairman of the full Senate Appropriations Committee, Sen. Mark O. Hatfield, D-OR, takes a special interest in libraries.

For funding of postal "revenue forgone" subsidy—House Treasury, Postal Service, General Government Appropriations Subcommittee, Washington, DC 20515: Rep. Edward R. Roybal (D-CA), Chairman; Rep. Joe Skeen (R-NM), ranking minority member.

Senate Treasury, Postal Service, and General Government Appropriations Subcommittee, Washington, DC 20510: Sen. James Abdnor (R-SD), Chairman; Sen. Dennis DeConcini (D-AZ), ranking minority member.

For more information on who to write in Congress, contact the ALA Washington Office, (202) 547-4440.

preservation and collection development.

Postal subsidies. Rep. Bill Ford (D-Michigan) has challenged the library community to come up with better data on postage costs to libraries and to support postal subsidies. This special effort is necessary because, for the first time ever, the Reagan Administration recommended elimination of *all* postal subsidies, even free mail for the blind. If all subsidy for library rate were removed, a 2-lb. book package would go from 54 cents to 94 cents—a 74% increase. The library rate subsidy is currently \$42 million—half of that for the printed and AV materials that libraries, schools, colleges, and other non-profit organizations send among themselves for interlibrary loan, film rentals, textbook distribution, etc., and half for publishers and distributors who are able to mail materials sold to libraries.

With the cooperation of ACRL, the ALA Washington Office surveyed the ACRL 100 institutions to get some data on postal costs. The 53 libraries which sent usable responses spent from \$344 to \$26,000 on postage; the average cost was \$5,800. Can your library afford to lose such support?

White House Conference on Library and Information Services. Legislation is pending for a second White House conference, to be held no later than 1989. The next White House conference is likely to be more focused, probably on information technology advances and the consequent opportunity and challenge for library services. When Frank Newman, in the new report "Higher Education and the American Resurgence" from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Learning, is saying that these technological advances have moved the research community be-

yond the capacity of the research library, that we must evolve from an emphasis on acquisitions to a new system based on access, and that perhaps this new system should not be called "library," can academic librarians afford *not* to become involved in the next White House conference?

And, in closing...

Letters from constituents are important Congressional-influencers. They can demonstrate that the position taken by ACRL and ALA is, in fact, endorsed by and important to its membership. And since, as stated before, letters from constituents have a fighting chance of getting past the staff and to the politicians, they can be the best means of giving politicians the facts they need to make a decision and the rationale they need to defend it.

Write today about the Higher Education Act, next week about postal subsidies, next month about the White House conference. And write about other issues of importance to you. The letters don't have to be long—and they don't even have to be typed. One Congressional staffer said he was more impressed by a hand-written letter than by a typed one—and by letters on plain paper instead of letterhead. You don't think your name should be on the letter? Draft a letter for your Director or Vice President for Academic Affairs to send.

The important thing is to write or make sure someone else in your area does. Because in the era of electronic mail, computer analyses and PAC campaigns, a single letter from a single constituent can still make an all-important difference. ■■

How to communicate with legislators

When to write. It is important to understand the legislative process in order to know when it will be most effective to contact legislators.

A bill may be written by an individual, an agency, a committee, or a subcommittee of one of the houses of Congress. Each bill is assigned to a committee that studies it and decides what action should be taken. Members of the committee should be contacted when the bill is about to come before the committee.

By calling the Bill Status Office in Washington, D.C., at (202) 225-1772 and referring to the bill number, it is possible to find out the date a bill was introduced, the names of its sponsors or co-sponsors, the date of committee hearings, and the current status of the bill in the legislative process.

After the bill comes out of committee, it is presented to the full House or Senate. When the bill is about to come before the House or Senate the representative should be contacted if it is a House bill or both Senators if it is a Senate bill.

Legislation requiring federal funding must go through two processes: authorization and funding. If Congress does not appropriate sufficient funds, or if executive agencies cut back on funds, a program can be seriously curtailed. Therefore, after a bill has been passed, it is important to state your views about the need for adequate funding to Congress or to the agency writing the regulations to implement the law.

It is important to lobby for appropriations before April 15 when the Budget Committees of the House and Senate report to their respective bodies the first resolution setting totals for government spending, revenues, deficit and level of public debt for the next fiscal year.

By May 15, the Budget Committees review various pieces of authorization legislation and by September 15, the second concurrent resolution establishes spending ceilings and a revenue floor. Keep these dates in mind to lobby for appropriations.

Personal visits. Face-to-face discussion is the