

There could not be a more appropriate time to publish this issue of *North Carolina Libraries* with its focus on libraries and the political process. The high summer season of politics is upon us, and its residual heat will be felt through the November elections and far beyond. No matter where we turn, we are constantly reminded that politics does have a major impact on our daily professional lives. It directly affects our libraries whether they are in Burlington, Manteo, Murphy or Raleigh; whether they are in school, community college, public, or academic settings. And we ignore it or, worse, withdraw from it at our peril.

Many of us need to rethink our attitudes toward politics and the political process. Instead of being reactive to political events, we must challenge ourselves to become proactive at local, state, and national levels. If we do not take this opportunity to shape our profession's future direction, someone else will certainly do it for us. We must do it for ourselves!

Becoming active in the political process is not difficult. Once we understand how the political process works, we can articulate to politicians and to the general public the value of our services, and clearly state what goals we wish to achieve. With this foundation, we can confidently participate in any political arena.

One word of warning though! To be successful politically, we constantly must be aware of what is taking place in the public/political arena. Like ocean currents, politics (and politicians) are constantly changing and shifting — sometimes very dramatically, other times very subtly. We cannot make one political push a year and expect to be successful; we must be committed to thinking and working politically on a full-time basis. To paraphrase Thomas Jefferson, the price of successful politics is eternal vigilance.

The articles in this issue are designed to give the reader views of several different political arenas. As you read them, pay close attention to the interaction between the libraries and the political processes described. Note the ways in which situations are affected by politics and how libraries (and librarians) respond.

Your attention is drawn to two special articles by current members of the North Carolina General Assembly. Senator Betsy Cochrane offers her advice for effectively working with legislators on specific issues: know your objectives(s), have your supporting factual information ready, and marshal your forces. Representative Josephus Mavretic reminds librarians that to succeed politically, it is necessary to develop innovative strategies and to think big.

As a follow-up to those two articles, Howard McGinn writes a "diary" of the odyssey of a bill from its inception, through the legislative process to the point where it actually becomes written into the North Carolina General Statutes as a law. Note the appendices to Howard's article that show the various transformations of the legislation.

Jerry Thrasher presents us with an example of a political success story at the local level. The individual and collective efforts of the Friends of the Hope Mills Public Library prove again that citizens can and do have an impact on political decisions that affect library programs. Such natural alliances between libraries and their patrons strengthen the net results of political efforts for both parties. This article alone could be a manual for grassroots political action.

Dale Gaddis's article offers excellent examples of the types of political situations that libraries face on a recurring basis. Note particularly the library's assessment of the political settings that frame these examples and its response to them. Although the examples are specific to Durham County, they can readily be compared to similar situations throughout our state.

For a view of internal library politics at the state level, read Dr. Benjamin Speller's analysis of the state's university libraries. Dr. Speller offers an historical view of how politics changes over a period of time and how that change affects the policies and directions of individual academic libraries.

Kitty Cagle writes of the direct effect that local politics has on an individual collection. She reminds us that we must be continually examining and evaluating our collections in the context of ongoing political changes.

"Point/Counterpoint" debates the issue of whether NCLA needs to have its own lobbyist. Ed Sheary argues that we can no longer afford not to have professional help in promoting and tracking our legislative programs. Harry Tuchmayer, on the other hand, responds by saying that we should all be lobbyists and use our ballot box strength as a lobbying tool.

Finally, make certain that you read (and re-read) Patricia Langelier's "Lagniappe" column. What a wonderful compilation of political resources for librarians and patrons alike! Ms. Langelier assembled and annotated a variety of very important and useful information resources.

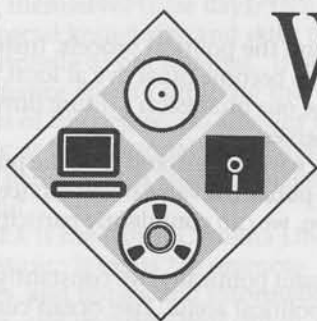
I wish to offer my thanks to all of the authors whose works are included in this issue. I greatly appreciate their time and effort, and I know that the readers of *North Carolina Libraries* will benefit from their work. Also, I want to say a special thank you to Nancy Bates, Director of the Davidson County Public Library, for her fine work and vision in outlining the articles, contacting prospective authors, and reviewing manuscripts for this issue.

As a way to focus the importance of the political process to all North Carolina librarians, begin your reading of this issue with Janet Freeman's presidential column. Janet has some very important things to say about NCLA, its internal political process, and the political roles that all of us can and should be playing for the improvement of our profession.

Foreword ...

by John Welch, Guest Editor

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