

From the President

Dave Fergusson, President

During the last month as I write this, my time has been occupied with (1) getting married, (2) purchasing a house, and (3) making the usual cosmetic changes in the house (generally this is called "painting"). Item (1) was the most enjoyable and sharing life with my new bride, Mary, has been wonderful. The aggravation factor associated with the other two activities has been steadily mounting. Did you know that today's latex paint is really made up of millions of microscopic worms and that they crawl up the brush, up your arm into your ear and make you CRAZY?

All this is to say that my thoughts about libraries have been on the back burner for a while, but this is the time of year when many libraries are in a fight for their budgets, so I will mention politics. John Via, Chair of the Governmental Relations Committee, reports that this year's ALA Library Legislative Day was VERY successful for North Carolina. A small but determined group visited with just about all of our members of Congress. Congressman Richard Burr of my district, among others, met and had pictures taken with our folks. ALA's Chief Legislative Council Adam Eisgrau came for lunch to meet with Rep. Howard Coble because of the Congressman's committee assignments dealing with copyright and intellectual property.

The delegation also included NCLA Honorary Member Elinor Swaim of Salisbury, past Chair of the National Commission on Libraries and Information Services; Friends of North Carolina Libraries President Elizabeth Laney; PLS Chair and BCALA President Sylvia Sprinkle-Hamlin; Assistant State Librarian John Welch; Nancy Gibbs from NCSU's D.H. Hill Library, whose son Bob Gibbs is Press Assistant to newly elected Congressman Bobby Etheridge; and last but not least, our old friend and the newly appointed head of ALA's Office of Literacy and Outreach Services, Satia Orange.

ALA should be commended for the good job that has been done recently to influence library related legislation. The revitalized Washington Office has been very effective. In other contexts, ALA often seems to exemplify an institution gone wild. Its systems of bureaucracy and governance are really a farce matched only by the U.S. Congress. Jonathan Swift should be around to parody this organization. But having said that (and hoping you do not hold similar feelings about NCLA) I want to give the Devil his due regarding the Washington Office's recent work.

If I have learned one thing by becoming a librarian rather than a gun dealer, it is that getting what you want or what you think is needed out of our political system is very, very difficult. The fact that so much now revolves around money - campaign money, big money, soft money, take your choice - gives a spiritually affluent group like ours a slight disadvantage relative to financially affluent groups like the NRA and big labor. So, what to do? NCPLDA (Public Library Directors Association) has made real gains in State aid by using numbers (like Richard Wells' bus loads of Friends who invade Raleigh on State Legislative Day) and well thought out campaigns supported by statewide communication as they have lobbied for specific goals.

It has long been my contention that libraries have never realized the potential that would exist if we could ever bring to bear the large numbers of users and supporters in our various communities. Unfortunately, none of them share the same experiences, they just LIKE libraries. Since they often enter as loners with their personal goals in mind, it is a difficult group to mobilize, not like the millions who are committed to a belief in concealed handguns or abortion rights. They will speak out for us in times of peril, but usually we are on our own. If you have had a successful experience mobilizing library users to offer support over the long haul, I would like to hear about it. Send me an e-mail at d_fergusson@forsyth.lib.nc.us (with a copy to Governmental Relations Chair John Via at jev@lib.wfunet.wfu.edu).

Finally, since this has turned into a column about politics and lobbying, I will revisit a few of the suggestions Iowa legislator Richard Varn gave us in his talk at NCLA in 1993. He suggested adopting greenhorn politicians of either party, with whom you agree, and helping them win their first election. They will not forget their original supporters. Compliment politicians through others who know them. Who wouldn't like to hear secondhand that you have been singing their praises? Don't threaten if you don't get what you want. Just keep trying and get more people to help you make your point. Elicit promises in public and don't just hold politicians to them, but have lots of folks thank them when they come through. Finally, Varn recommended forming PAC's which would keep track of voting records and financially support library friends. Some of these would be major steps for NCLA and we have never made the serious leap into the political area, but we can all try some of these approaches. Write a letter when someone supports libraries. It really does help.

Or do it the old-fashioned way - send them your \$1,000.