

From the President

Beverley Gass, President

I have a friend who does not believe that it makes a difference whether you vote or not. Yet he will go to considerable effort to find campaign signs to display in his front yard. He even works for the election of those candidates, particularly in local elections, whom he knows and believes in or believes in and wants to know. Over the period of a campaign, he may even do some fairly assertive things to get to know candidates. Once during a school board primary, he spent several hours on the phone calling all the folks in his address book to solicit their support for a friend/candidate in an upcoming election. He really seems to understand the importance of communicating with and for those who may be or are our elected leaders and assumes that he can, by getting to know a candidate or an elected official, make a difference in how things go.

Obviously, many others believe in the idea that communicating your interests and needs to elected officials is an important civic responsibility. The American Library Association, for example, is one group that clearly values and works diligently to express its opinions and influence the way things go in Washington. So does the North Carolina Library Association when it sends a delegation to Washington to participate in the ALA Legislative Day that occurs annually. Again this year, a North Carolina delegation journeyed to D.C. to participate in the annual ALA Legislative Day. The group included Augie Beasley, chair of the NCLA Governmental Relations Committee, Dave Fergusson, Beverley Gass, Karen Perry, John Via, Claudette Wiese, and John Welch.

To give you some idea of what the days (the actual day is preceded by an all-day briefing session conducted by ALA Washington Office Staff) are like, some of those folks who attended agreed to share their impressions of the event with you. With a two-paragraph limitation, the edited results yield a glimpse at what occurred.

Dave Fergusson writes of the number of congressmen, aides, and other staffers that he visited. His experience was typical of all members of the delegation.

When it comes to personal contact and presumed transmission of ideas, the visits we made to five legislators this year went as well as I can remember.... Representative Cass Ballenger represents part of Forsyth county and was the first in a string of Congressmen who proclaimed support for the E-rate. He praised the new Beaver Library in Hickory during our 25 minute meeting. Next, we popped in on our leader Augie Beasley as he visited Representative Walter B. Jones. Since none of us lived even remotely near the man's district, we spent time with an aide, but were well received. We then visited with Mike McIntyre's aide, who knew as much about the E-rate as we did, and then met Congressman McIntyre.

After being bedazzled by the luncheon choices in the Longworth Building cafeteria, we visited our own Congressman, Richard Burr. Again, support for the E-rate and a 40-minute talk that showed a real interest in the future of library services. We finished up with Representative Mel Watt, who had also attended the NCLA breakfast. We believe he is very supportive of libraries.

Claudette Wiese shares her experience of seeing the government at work and attempting to influence those who do the work.

Being a representative to Library Legislative Day was a stimulating experience, to say the least. On Monday, ALA held an all-day workshop on issues concerning libraries. There were suggestions on how to lobby our congressional delegation. The E-Rate, Internet filtering, and the Title VI program were of particular interest to me as a school librarian.

On Tuesday, North Carolina sponsored a breakfast for NC Congressmen and, in some cases, their aides. Then visits were made to the offices of Representatives Etheridge and Hefner and Senator Helms. In between times, I managed to visit the Library of Congress and the Senate where a bill was being introduced. It was interesting to watch our Senate in action. I would encourage everyone to visit Washington and drop in on his or her representatives and senators.

Augie Beasley appears to be equally impressed by the opportunity to do some lobbying and the city itself.

Being part of ALA's Legislative Day is more than just talking to legislators about the importance of libraries, although that is the primary reason we go to Washington. It is meeting librarians from other parts of the country and learning that they have the same needs and problems that we have in North Carolina. And it is seeing that, as a group, we do have a voice in Washington and can influence legislation.

Fascinating, exhilarating, stimulating, and tiring best describe my feelings about Legislative Day in Washington, D.C. Just being there is a visual and aural treat and experience. There is vitality and energy in D.C. that is missing in Charlotte. Even the strident "honk" of a jaundiced cabby as he careens past, barely missing you at an intersection is a treat. The city is alive.... I do think I would enjoy living there. But then, who retires to Washington, D.C?

Finally, we have Karen Perry's picture. Is it a bit of Baroque? Rococo? Impressionism? Surrealism? Whatever. But her last stroke turns to realism.

We stood in the Jefferson Hall of the Library of Congress, our national treasure, where so many other famous Americans had placed their feet. Looking up at the wonderful literary frescos, we walked peculiarly, as though inebriated with the colors and images surrounding us. It was dramatic, so bright, not what you expect from granite and marble. "Oh my," said Beverly Gass, NCLA President. "Let's go up and look down," said Augie Beasley, NCLA Legislative Chair. "Great! I can take a picture from down here," said Karen Perry, NCASL Past President, leaning safely on the stone landing. Claudette Wiese, NCASL Legislative Representative, followed Augie to the balcony. Karen framed the picture to include the words Library of Congress with her friends. She spied John Welch, Assistant State Librarian, on the center floor. "John, come pose with the statue holding up the torch." Congressman Price asked, "Have you been to the Library of Congress?" Congressman Coble asked, "Did you see the Library of Congress? They've done great things over there." "It is just beautiful," said Congressman Watt.

Our visit to Washington was a success for North Carolina libraries. We made our case for funding and fair use while we linked the visible symbol of the Library of Congress as representative of all our libraries back home. It was fun.

And it was. Join us next year on May 3-4 for the annual pilgrimage to Washington. Perhaps it will be filled with as much wonderment as it was for me and Karen Perry, who upon visiting Representative Howard Coble's office found two committee staffers from Representative Coble's Subcommittee on Courts and Intellectual Property of the Committee on the Judiciary of the United States House of Representatives, awaiting us. Not only did we have their undivided attention, the staffers gave us pieces of hard candy that said "I love libraries!" Could it have been that they wanted to persuade us that the pending "Database Protection" legislation was a good thing despite ALA's stance? Who knows? And who was lobbying whom?

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1. *North Carolina Libraries* seeks to publish articles, materials reviews, and bibliographies of professional interest to librarians in North Carolina. Articles need not be necessarily of a scholarly nature, but they should address professional concerns of the library community in the state.
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Keyes Metcalf, *Planning Academic and Research Library Buildings* (New York: McGraw, 1965), 416.
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