

## Federal Legislation — An Opportunity And A Challenge

By

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Federal aid to libraries, as you all know, is a fairly recent phenomenon in the library field. Librarians began their first serious bid for some funds to help extend library services to rural areas just after World War II and, after about a decade of effort, succeeded in getting the first Library Services Act in 1956. The Act provided 7½ million dollars annually but only 2½ million was actually appropriated the first year, and we were three long years reaching the authorized amount of 7½ million.

It was on this foundation stone that all of our success in after years has been built. Then few seemed really interested in libraries—no administration would put the item in its budget, sponsors had to be searched out and persuaded, and even many of our friends were hesitant to come out and vote for libraries. Apparently almost no one anticipated how popular library legislation would be and it was not until about four years ago, when the extension of the Library Services Act was voted out of the House Rules Committee by the most overwhelming vote ever given such a measure in the House, that people in and out of Congress, including the Administration, suddenly realized it was a popular thing to support libraries. From there on, library bills have been administration bills, and the question has been not whether or not to support, but how much and how wide the application, with this culminating last year in the remark of a prominent senator that there are two things which get the green stamps in Congress these days—Libraries and Vocational Education. Library legislation has truly come of age.

You folks are familiar with this history and, being the group you are, must be interested in our Higher Education Act just passed by Congress and its possibilities for your libraries. This bill culminates long efforts by librarians not only for aid to academic libraries but in other areas of our activity as well. It complements the Higher Education Facilities Act of 1963 which provided for grants in aid for college and university library buildings and joins the Elementary and Secondary School Act of 1965 which provides aid for school libraries and the well known Library Services and Construction Act (1964) for public libraries to complete the triumvirate which is responsible for most library services today.

Briefly the bill as passed provides 50 million dollars annually for three years for grants in aid for acquisition of materials—books, periodicals, and audio-visual items—for binding in college and university libraries, and 15 million dollars each year for financing and encouraging library training and research. Also provided are available sums, ranging from \$5,000,000 the first year to \$7,770,000 the third to enable the Library of Congress to acquire a larger portion of the literature now published outside the United States and to make L. C. cards available for this and for cataloging arrearages now accumulated at the Library of Congress.

The grants for materials provide that an institution maintaining its past levels of expenditure can qualify for \$5,000 by matching with \$5,000 of its own money. Beyond this, there are supplemental grants up to \$10 per student which the Commissioner of Education may make to further improve the size and quality of library resources. Also, there is \$12,500,000 set aside for special grants by the Commissioner to meet unusual

1. Delivered to College and University Section, NCLA, Nov. 5, 1965.

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situations which cannot be clearly foreseen at this time. The relative significance of this aid can be readily seen when it is realized that all college and university libraries in the country will this year expend about \$75,000,000. This then could mean a possible doubling of funds for many of the smaller libraries and a substantial boost for all. It is certainly a major milestone in college and university library development.

Friends occasionally ask me how I justify federal aid to libraries in view of some criticism of it and objections lodged against it. I think I may sum up my position with the following statements, but also say these are not set forth dogmatically but rather tentatively and with the full knowledge that those who disagree can feel quite sincerely that they have compelling reasons for believing as they do.

1. Education is one of the most fundamental forces in American life today, and libraries and their service are a basic part of this important movement.
2. There are wide differences in ability and willingness of agencies, both public and private, throughout the country to provide satisfactory opportunities for individuals to develop their capacities to the fullest, and the situation is such that the individual has little or no opportunity for control.
3. The Federal government, because of its power, resources, and national application, has the unique opportunity to correct these imbalances and foster a better quality of library service everywhere, as well as helping bear some costs of service placed on libraries by the government itself, by a judicious use of grants in aid.
4. The oft quoted charge that federal aid means federal control is not borne out by experience. On the contrary, actual experience has shown that effort towards undesirable control, when it is manifested, has come from local bodies, rather than from state or federal agencies.

With this brief statement of my position and in the hope that you share at least a part of these sentiments, I should like to talk briefly about how each of us may work more effectively with our legislative people, and particularly our representatives in Congress, to bring into being desirable legislation for our libraries and their development. Of course, the final legislation will be the result of the efforts of many people, but each of these has an individual responsibility.

First, and this is most basic, each one of you should become acquainted with the congressman from your district. North Carolina has eleven districts; Winston-Salem, for instance, is in the Fifth District, and Mr. Ralph Scott is your congressman. He has been one of the best friends for libraries we have had in Congress, and I want here to express publicly my appreciation and that of ALA for his assistance on many occasions.

These congressmen are all at home now—this is a period between sessions—and this is a good time to take a few minutes to drop in to express your appreciation for their work—if they have supported our legislation—or, if not, and in any case, to tell them what this legislation means to your library. Congressmen are human beings, just as you and I, and they like to know that what they are doing is a help to their constituents. Although each congressman has an average of some 500,000 people in his district, very few take the trouble to try to see him, so, although you may think you are only one of many, you really are the exception and will be remembered.

There is another way you can improve your acquaintance and make yourself even more remarkable in his memory. If it should be an election year, as 1966 will be, the policy of a modest contribution to his campaign is one many of us could well follow in being good citizens and contributing to good government. Helping him with his campaign expenses and promising him your vote on election day will assure him of your support, and he will be impressed by the sincerity of your interest in his candidacy. A congressman would much rather have one hundred ten-dollar contributions from private citizens such as yourself than a single one thousand dollar gift. In the first place, he knows you are interested in the legislative process and in good government and is justifiably pleased; in the second, he usually knows, or at least suspects, that in accepting it he will definitely be expected to assume a position on certain legislation which may or may not be to his liking. But a congressman does have to conduct a campaign to be elected, and campaigns cost money, so where is he to turn if small contributors fail? Big money is frequently available but unwanted; small contributions are much wanted but often unavailable. This is one way we can keep our representatives independent, and I think it is as much our duty to do this as it is to cast our vote.

It is through this acquaintance that you may be able to get your congressman to listen. You will still have to have a good case and one in which you really believe. By listening I mean the willingness to try to understand the situation and to do what needs to be done about it. It may seem that he should do this anyway, but these are *very* busy people, with legislative sessions, committee meetings, visits from constituents, and mountains of correspondence to be faced daily, and some help is needed to enable you to stand out as an individual. Congressmen by and large are able and sincere, and they are the hardest working people and serve at a greater personal sacrifice than any other group I know, including librarians and teachers. Is it any wonder, then, that a congressman from all this mass of work may give more attention to the support of a proposal by a constituent he *knows* is interested in good government and in his work?

Again, to work effectively, you must know the legislative process. With legislation which lacks general national interest, such as library legislation, as compared to medicare, for instance, congressional committees often hold the power of life or death. If the particular committee holds hearings and recommends a bill do pass, it is passed by the House or Senate; if not so recommended, it dies in the committee, and no vote is ever taken. So it is with the relatively few members of the committees concerned in the House and Senate on whom we have to concentrate most of our efforts.

The committee in the House for library legislation is the Committee on Education and Labor. In the Senate, it is the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare. Again, these committees are broken down into subcommittees; in the House, the Subcommittee on Special Education under the chairmanship of Mrs. Green of Oregon; and in the Senate, the Subcommittee on Education with Mr. Morse of Oregon as chairman. It is the members of these subcommittees who often determine the fate of library legislation in Congress.

We hear much about your duty to write your congressman and this often does help if done at the right time and in the right way. If he is a member of one of the above committees, writing him when the bill is before his committee is highly important; if he is not, then he may not be able to help until it comes to the floor of the House or Senate for a vote. In any case, he should be approached *at the time he can be of service*, with a statement of the current status of your bill.

I mentioned earlier that our library bills have become Administration bills. This is a great advantage because it places behind them the power and prestige of the President and his political party. It does have the disadvantage, however, of causing some of our best friends in the minority party to have to vote in opposition to them because of political allegiance; also, it is harder to get bills with exactly the provisions librarians want because they must be politically palatable. And therein lies our opportunity and our challenge—the opportunity with federal aid to build libraries and offer library services to an extent not even dreamed of a decade ago, and a challenge to provide this aid in such a manner as to promote and preserve the greatest local initiative in and local control of libraries in their substantial contribution to our American way of life.

The first time I read an excellent book, it is to me just as if I had gained a new friend; when I read over a book I have perused before, it resembles the meeting with an old one.—Goldsmith, *Citizen of the World*.



COLLEGE LIBRARIANS — Major participants in the College and University Section meeting were (seated): Mrs. Mildred Councill, Boone; Mrs. Elizabeth Holder, Greensboro; and (standing, l to r): Walter Gray, Rocky Mount; Edmon Low, Oklahoma State University, who was the major speaker; and Mrs. Marcia Bradshaw, Statesville.