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# Influencing the information environment

**By Harold B. Shill**

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*ALA Legislative Day, April 19, 1988, is an opportunity to support our profession.*

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**B**eset by rising costs of materials, shifting institutional priorities, inadequate support from funding agencies, and the need to invest in new technologies, academic librarians may often feel a sense of powerlessness toward their environment. Librarians participating in ALA's annual Legislative Day in Washington, however, have discovered that it is possible to exert an influence upon decisions made at the highest levels of government.

Started in 1975 under the sponsorship of the ALA Washington Office and the District of Columbia Library Association, Legislative Day has grown from a small event attended by barely 100 librarians from a handful of states to a major effort including more than 500 librarians and library supporters from 40 or more states. Despite the steady rise in participation shown in Table 1, however, the number of academic librarians has increased from only 15 persons in 1976 to 38 individuals in 1987.

Impressive though the overall growth in Legislative Day involvement may be, academic librarians still comprised only 7% of the total number of persons participating in 1987. Given ACRL's status as the largest division in ALA, the large number of national issues affecting academic libraries, and the high stakes involved in those issues, the level of Legislative Day participation by academic librarians has been undesirably low. This article will

point out some vital reasons for Legislative Day involvement, describe the Legislative Day experience, and give some suggestions for contributing to the day's success whether or not you are able to come to Washington on April 19, 1988, for the next ALA Legislative Day.

## **The issues**

Diverse issues affecting academic libraries—many of them not even containing the word “library” in their popular names—have emerged onto the political agenda of the 1980s. This proliferation of new issues is due only partly to the Reagan Administration's belief that governmental size and involvement in domestic affairs should be minimized. In addition, the increasingly pervasive use of new information and communication technologies has spawned an entirely new set of domestic and international policy questions. Furthermore, the decline in American competitiveness, the foreign trade imbalance, and rising annual deficits have significantly altered the environment in which information, education and library program decisions are made. Prominent as these new issues have become, annual appropriations for library-related programs remain a vital concern affecting academic library functions ranging from cataloging to document delivery.

The Administration has generally sought to reduce the Federal role in the library/information sector by zero-funding (eliminating appropriations for) library-related programs, reducing data collection and information dissemination, relying on the private sector wherever possible for information distribution, imposing user fees, eliminating existing publications that might "compete" with private sector information services, and contracting out the operation of government libraries as commercial services. In specific programs, the Administration has sought to: 1) eliminate funding for the Library Services and Construction Act (all titles), the library titles (II-A through II-D) of the Higher Education Act, and the postal revenue forgone subsidy; 2) eliminate more than 25% of all U.S. Government publications; 3) "privatize" (sell) all portions of the National Technical Information Service (NTIS), which might be operated at a profit by private vendors; 4) create bibliographic and user fee impediments to citizen use of government information; 5) discontinue the collection of valuable economic, demographic and housing data; and 6) contract out the operation of major government libraries (Department of Energy, NOAA) to private firms, including American subsidiaries of foreign corporations. Successful implementation of these initiatives would drastically restructure the information landscape of the United States.

Academic library use of the new technologies has been, and will continue to be, affected profoundly by government decisions on telecommunications and copyright. Telecommunications expenditures by academic libraries have risen sharply in the past three years as the Federal Communications Commission has incrementally granted much of the increase in private line tariffs sought by AT&T. Only a massive outpouring of correspondence from librarians was sufficient to dissuade the FCC from

granting AT&T's full request. A recent FCC proposal to impose access charges averaging \$4.47 per hour on enhanced service providers (TELENET, TYMNET, CompuServe, etc.) has aroused strong opposition among librarians and information vendors using those services. Since online catalogs, bibliographic utilities and online databases had not yet become integral components of academic library operations when the 1976 Copyright Act revisions were written, we can also anticipate the resurfacing of copyright questions at the national level in the near future.

The converging imperatives of competitiveness, the trade imbalance and deficit reduction create yet another set of pressures to justify library programs and Federal information activities. Concern with the U.S. competitive position, particularly in high technology, has stimulated such Congressional initiatives as the Japanese Technical Literature Act in 1986, the introduction of bills to prevent NTIS privatization in 1987, and House subcommittee hearings on Federal Information Resources Policy in 1987. With deficit reduction generally recognized as a critical problem requiring immediate response following the October 19 stock market "crash," library and information programs will be scrutinized critically along with other domestic programs by both Democrats and Republicans in 1988. Academic librarians must demonstrate that these programs deserve a high priority, even in a period of fiscal austerity, if they are not to be reduced, eliminated or privatized. Linkages between these programs, academic libraries and economic development or competitiveness are especially important to highlight in the prevailing political atmosphere.

Annual appropriations for Higher Education Act programs, Title III of the Library Services and Construction Act (resource sharing), the postal revenue forgone subsidy, the Library of Congress, the

**TABLE 1**  
**ALA Legislative Day Participation, 1975-87**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Persons Attending</i>	<i>States Represented</i>
1975	n.a.	n.a.
1976	160	28
1977	118	29
1978	212	35
1979	226	29
1980	233	41
1981	300 (approx.)	31
1982	300 +	41
1983	350 (approx.)	37
1984	350 (approx.)	42
1985	375 (approx.)	44
1986	475 (approx.)	45
1987	520	43

Data compiled by: Shari L. Weaver, ALA Washington Office



Government Printing Office, the National Agricultural Library, the National Library of Medicine, the National Endowments for the Humanities and the Arts, the College Work-Study program (HEA Title IV-C), the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, and other Federal agencies must similarly be justified. Academic librarians bringing direct evidence of the contributions to their institutions from these programs can assist enormously in securing continued funding for agencies and specific programs alike.

Finally, the House and Senate must still agree upon parameters for a second White House Conference on Libraries and Information Science to be held between 1989 and 1991. Once the two houses reach agreement on supporting legislation, the implementing measure must be signed into law by the President. With the emergence of so many new issues since the 1979 White House Conference, it is essential that consensus be reached on the structuring of this meeting if national information priorities are to be established as we enter the electronic information age.

### Why should I participate?

Given the importance of the issues being discussed and their broad social implications, the need to preserve the library function in an "information society" and protect our users' access should be reason enough to justify participation in the April 19, 1988, ALA Legislative Day. However, there are also several other important reasons to be involved.

First, our presence is necessary to *educate* Congressmen about academic libraries. It is a mild shock, for instance, to learn that many Members of Congress think only of public libraries when they hear the term "libraries." While most are fairly well aware of higher education and its needs, few perceive academic libraries as being central to the future of those institutions and their societal mission without a little help from academic librarians. Data about increasing materials, telecommunications and postal costs can be quite meaningful to Congressmen if placed in the context of issues *they* consider important. Cuts in journal budgets, for example, convey a clear message to a Member who has supported college or university efforts to lure high-tech industries to his/her district. Most of our college-educated Members will also have completed their studies prior to the era of online catalogs, online databases and bibliographic utilities. While their staff members may make use of various databases, including the Library of Congress' online catalog, Congressmen themselves may still remember the college library primarily as a repository of course reserve materials. Once updated in their knowledge, they are likely to respond more favorably to requests for help in containing the costs of computer-based services, interlibrary loan and "privatized" government information services.

A second reason to attend ALA Legislative Day is to encourage Members to support library and information programs. While public and school librarians from a state delegation may sincerely try to represent academic library concerns, they simply cannot do so with the same knowledge and effectiveness as a real academic librarian. Having tried to represent the concerns of school libraries

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## *Our presence is needed to educate Congress about academic libraries.*

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and librarians as West Virginia's Federal Relations Coordinator for the past two years, I can confirm that our best efforts are no substitute for a person with firsthand knowledge.

Additionally, there is an enormous amount of personal satisfaction derived from the experience. That sense of satisfaction comes from having the chance to express your concerns directly to a Member and getting immediate feedback, from the shared experience of expressing common concerns with public and school librarians, from learning more about the needs of other types of libraries, and from getting intensive exposure to the workings of our national legislature in an all-too-short period of time. One past president of the West Virginia Library Association (a public librarian) has called Legislative Day the finest experience of his professional career. Whatever the outcome of their legislator visits, most librarians have found it to be a wonderful learning experience which imparts a real sense of political efficacy and encourages further involvement in the political arena.

### How is it organized?

Librarians and library supporters attend Legislative Day in state delegations. Those groups are usually organized by a Federal Relations Coordinator, the chair of the state library association's legislative committee, state association executive directors or the heads of state library agencies.

Those individuals, state association presidents, library school deans and several other key officials in each state receive initial communications about ALA Legislative Day from the Washington Office in mid-January. That initial correspondence will include information about times, locations, hotels and travel in Washington, D.C. Subsequent communications at intervals of a few weeks will request an initial list of persons planning to attend and a final list of those attending. These lists are used to



invite legislators and their staff members to a reception at the end of the day.

The state coordinator will communicate with librarians in his/her state by memorandum, state journal article, telephone or other means to identify individuals who can attend. Those individuals may be asked to develop "library impact data" sheets to share with Congressmen at Legislative Day. That data will be included with data provided by other participants from the same state in a packet of materials showing the importance of Federal programs or decisions to libraries in that state.

In addition to recruiting participants, the state coordinator will also set up appointments in individual Congressional offices. He or she may then assign participants to meet with individual legislators. Depending on the size of the state's Congressional delegation and the number of librarians present, individual participants will visit 3-6 offices. One of those visits will normally be with the Member from that librarian's home district.

Legislative Day itself will begin with an early morning (8:15 or 8:30) briefing on major issues and current developments by representatives of the ALA Washington Office. Issue packets for participants and Congressmen are also distributed at this briefing, and state impact materials may be added to those compiled by the ALA Washington Office in both legislator and participant packets. The Chairman of the House Labor-HHS-Education Committee and Rep. Major Owens, our librarian in Congress, have frequently appeared to welcome visiting librarians. Key Congressional staff members may also appear to give an update on fast-breaking issues.

Visits with legislators themselves are invariably fascinating. In some offices, librarians may have a lengthy visit with an education aide or administrative assistant, followed by a shorter meeting with the House Member or Senator. In other offices, the Member may meet with the librarian group with a key aide present and taking notes. Some Members will not have an aide present at all. Sometimes, a Member may be called away during the meeting for a vote on the floor or a committee meeting. Should that occur, the meeting will normally continue with an apologetic aide. Individual meetings with librarians will range from 10 minutes to an hour or more, so the coordinator will normally schedule meetings based on past Congressional behavior and physical distance between offices. Whatever the structure, the face-to-face sharing of perspectives is a rich experience valued by all.

After a few words of welcome, the Congressman (or woman) will usually ask the group what concerns they wish to present. He or she will then listen to comments from group participants and review the packet of materials from ALA and the state. An interested legislator will periodically interject a question. While some questions may merely request clarification, others ("What should we cut to

support your programs?" "Would you want your taxes raised?") may be tough and divisive for an unprepared delegation. It is likely that your Congressman will already have heard from the group whose programs you may recommend cutting, so it is generally best to respond that such determinations should be made by the legislator. These questions are most easily handled if the state delegation has had a strategy meeting before or just after the morning briefing. Be prepared to make specific requests, too.

A very pleasant reception for visiting librarians, Congressmen and Congressional staff members is held at the conclusion of the day, following a short de-briefing session where participants share their experiences. The reception is an opportunity to chat more informally with Members, their staff assistants and other librarian participants. Since there are several similar receptions occurring for other visiting groups at the same time, the Members themselves will normally not stay long though their staff members may do so. This is an especially useful opportunity to know the staff members better.

These contacts are crucially important, since the staff members present for your office visit are normally the education/library "experts" on a Member's staff. It should be stressed that participants should *not* be discouraged should they see a staff member instead of a Senator or Representative during an office visit. The Members will generally ask these staff members for guidance before making decisions on library-related matters, and those very staff members will generally be the person with whom librarians have contact between Legislative Days.

### **Do I need to do any homework?**

It is always a good idea to do some review of the budget process and current issues before visiting a Congressional office. The budget process has become more complicated since 1974, with budget "targets" being set for each of 13 budget "functions" (education and libraries are Function 500) before any appropriations bills are introduced. After that, the process of passing appropriations or writing a bill into law is essentially the same one you studied in political science before 1974.

Impact data from your own library is particularly useful. How much did your library spend on interlibrary loan postage and other correspondence last year, and what would be the impact of a postal rate increase? How would your online catalog be affected by higher private line access tariffs? Would you be able to complete the U.S. Newspaper Project or a similar effort if NEH funds were cut? How could HEA Title II-A help your library keep up with soaring materials costs? How could HEA Title II-D help your library get an online catalog, start database searching, access OCLC's Union Catalog, or share resources? How would elimi-

*(cont'd on p.25)*



nation of LSCA Title III affect your ILL business? The list could go on and on, but your data will make a vivid impression which reinforces your verbal presentation of the same information. If your state coordinator is preparing a state impact hand-out, share your data with him/her well in advance of Legislative Day. This will facilitate its inclusion in a state packet which will go to your entire Congressional delegation, not just those Members of Congress you visit personally. This type of communication will enhance your personal impact and convey the needs of academic libraries even to Congressional offices that are not actually visited by an academic librarian. The information you provide will be kept in that Congressional office and used later when decisions upon library-related issues must be made.

Finally, you should do some background research on the Members of Congress you will be visiting. Barone and Ujifusa's *Almanac of American Politics* (1988 ed.) contains excellent profiles of individual Congressmen, including biographical data, previous political experience, committee assignments, issues of particular interest to him/her, information on the district or state represented, and voting scores generated by such watchdog organizations as the Americans for Democratic Action and the National Taxpayers Union. This information can help you identify areas of common interest and subjects you may wish to avoid. You may be able to discover whether the Congressman has attended your institution, is interested in research being done at the institution, or is active on committees (Agriculture if you are from a land-grant university, for instance) where your university's programs may contribute to his political interests.

### **Fulbright grants available**

The Council for International Exchange of Scholars (CIES) has announced that a number of 1988-89 Fulbright Grants remain available to U.S. faculty in the field of library science. There are specific openings in Malaysia, Malta, Peru, and Romania. Other countries are open to applications in any discipline and library science is among their preferred fields.

Scholars in all academic ranks, including emeritus, are eligible to apply; it is expected that applicants will have a Ph.D., college or university teaching experience, and evidence of scholarly productivity. U.S. citizenship is required. In a few countries (Central and South America and Francophone Africa), knowledge of the host country is required.

For information, call or write: CIES, Eleven Dupont Circle, N.W., Suite 300, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 939-5401.

### **What if I can't come?**

Distance and expense may impose significant barriers for some academic librarians who would like to attend Legislative Day. It is not coincidental, for instance, that the seven states not represented at the 1987 Legislative Day—Arkansas, Hawaii, Idaho, Louisiana, Nebraska, Nevada and

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*Impact data from your library is very useful.*

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Utah—all lie wholly or partially west of the Mississippi River.

It is still vitally important that legislators from these states hear from academic librarians. A telegram, letter or phone call about one or several issues or particular interest to you can be particularly effective on that day. Be sure to mention that it is ALA Legislative Day and that more than 500 librarians from around the country will be present on Capitol Hill. Even though your state and its academic library sector may not be represented in person, you can let your Senators and Congressman know that the academic library community is important by communicating with them April 19.

### **How do I get involved?**

The first step in joining your state delegation is to find out who will be serving as coordinator. You should be able to get this information from your state association president, legislative committee chair, or Federal Relations Coordinator. If you do not know these individuals or have not been active in your state library association, the ALA Washington Office (110 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, DC 20002) or this writer (Evansdale Library, P.O. Box 6105, Morgantown, WV 26506-6105) will be glad to identify the contact person for you.

It is advisable to make reservations in Washington as early as possible. April is always a busy month in the Nation's Capital, and the Cherry Blossom Festival will bring many tourists earlier in the month. Also, let your state coordinator know your travel plans as early as possible. It may be necessary to make some last-minute changes in legislator visit schedules, and it will be helpful to him/her to have an address and phone number where you can be reached just before the event itself.

Finally, keep your commitments. Should you need to cancel your plans to attend, let your state coordinator know as soon as possible. Should something happen en route (travel delays, etc.), you may need to contact the first Congressional office



on your schedule to relay your estimated time of arrival to the coordinator. These delays do happen, and Congressional staff will be glad to help—remember, you are constituents of their boss!

### **How can I afford it?**

A trip to Washington does represent a substantial investment for librarians coming from a distance, and many institutions and library associations will provide some assistance.

Check first with your institution. ALA Legislative Day is a professional association event, and many academic institutions will provide at least partial support for your expenses from the library travel budget.

Another possible source of assistance is the state library association. Funds to partially cover travel expenses of participants are included in the Federal Relations Coordinator's budget in many library associations. We have provided \$50–\$75 per person from the West Virginia Library Association over the past four years.

Finally, look into pooling expenses with fellow participants. If your state is within driving distance of Washington several participants may drive together in one car. Indicate to your state coordinator that you would be interested in sharing hotel expenses with another participant. Contact old friends in Washington or its environs to see about spending the night. If you plan early, expenses can be kept to a reasonable minimum.

In the final analysis, most participants cover at least some of their own expenses. However, I have yet to hear a participant complain that the money was not well spent.

### **Does it really matter?**

Your presence makes a tremendous difference. Congressmen know that visiting librarians are citizen lobbyists who truly care enough to come to Washington at their own expense. They know that you are not a highly paid lobbyist with a fat travel account, and your presence tells them that there are many more “silent librarians” back in the home district who feel similarly. It is crucial that they know that there *is* an academic library constituency, that they will continue to hear from that constituency, and that the issues presented by academic librarians do matter.

With only 38 academic librarians present from our 50 states at the 1987 ALA Legislative Day, we clearly had less than one librarian present per state. If those 38 academic librarians averaged four Congressional office visits each, the needs of academic libraries were presented to only 152 of our 535 Members of Congress. It is a small wonder that many national legislators think “public library” when they hear the word “library.”

We can learn a great deal about lobbying from our colleagues in the public library sector. Since a public library budget must receive approval from

both a library board and elected local officials, public librarians are engaged annually in a political effort to justify their continued existence. That habit of advocacy carries over very effectively into politics at the Federal level.

In academic libraries, on the other hand, our budgets are prepared in the dean or director's office and submitted as a formal, written proposal to academic administrators. Though the academic dean or provost or vice-president may question the library director about his/her proposals, there is no public hearing on the academic library budget proposal comparable to those which public library directors experience annually. As a result, we are conditioned to living within the constraints of a budget presented successively by library directors to academic administrators, by those administrators to governing boards, and (in public institutions, at least) by those governing boards to state legislators. Final decision-making authority is so far removed from the world of the line librarian as to effectively prevent meaningful contributions to the decision-making process at higher levels.

Ironically, we may have much readier access to Members of Congress than we have to governing boards or state legislative committees. Acting as members of a professional association, we are not bound by institutional or state system hierarchies. The perspectives of the online searcher and the entry-level reference librarian can contribute significantly to a Congressman's understanding of the world in which academic libraries now function. The informational packets prepared by the ALA Washington Office and state coordinators also provide an insider's overview of major issues, thereby offsetting any feeling a visiting librarian may have about his/her level of knowledge. Visiting librarian delegations also provide a support group for the novice librarian lobbyist. Subsequent visits become progressively easier as librarians develop a feel for the process.

It is important that academic librarians take advantage of this opportunity to lobby directly with Congressmen if academic library concerns are to be adequately represented as decisions affecting the structure of the information society are made. The role of libraries in promoting democracy, productivity and literacy has been established as the theme of the 1989 (or later) White House Conference on Libraries and Information Science. It is crucially important to American democracy, of which colleges and universities are an integral part, that the Federal Government continue acquiring and disseminating information to support research, teaching and service across the disciplinary spectrum. It is imperative that we enhance access to technical literature and economic data if the United States is to improve its productivity and its competitive posture. It is vital to the development of a literate, productive workforce that we support the education of effective teachers and research on literacy.

Participation in ALA Legislative Day is critical for enhancing the visibility of academic libraries in the political process, for educating our Congressmen about the changing academic library and the issues affecting it, and for developing working relationships with Congressmen and key staff members. It is both intrinsically rewarding as an experience and very much essential for creating the type

of information environment in which our institutions, our users and the larger community will thrive.

Please mark April 19, 1988, on your calendar. If you cannot come, please write or call your Congressmen to support this crucial effort by the library community. ■■

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## ALA and its divisions

By Patricia Glass Schuman

*ALA Treasurer*

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*Remarks of the ALA Treasurer to incoming divisional presidents-elect at the Divisional Leadership Program, September 19, 1987.*

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In 1976 ALA adopted the principle that costs for divisional staff, programs, and publications should be funded from income derived from division dues and other activities. However, the general association budget would assume responsibility for certain basic services at no charge to divisions.

In 1982 an operating agreement between ALA and the divisions was adopted by ALA Council. A revision of this agreement has been drafted by the ALA staff. Divisional presidents will no doubt be asked to comment—and probably act on it—during their terms of office.

The purpose of the operating agreement is to define fiscal and administrative policies. Essentially it spells out the terms of the symbiotic relationship between ALA and its divisions. Those policies contained in the operating agreement have and will continue to have an impact on ALA's allocation of resources. This impact is not always obvious from the way the figures are presented in budgets and

other ALA financial documents.

The interrelationship between ALA and its divisions must be viewed in the context of ALA's complex structure. This includes not only divisions but other membership units and departments that also sponsor the programs of the association and generate revenue. Publishing, Communications, and the eleven divisions of ALA are the three principal revenue-generating units. These, along with ALA offices, are our association's major service providers. Fiscal Services and Administrative Services provide essential support to these units.

The divisions provide programs at conferences, publications, standards and guidelines, regional workshops and continuing education courses, advisory services for members and non-members, and numerous important opportunities for members to serve on committees, to network, and to participate in the work of the association. Given the importance, size, and large membership base of the