



American Library Association – New Jersey Chapter Councilor’s Report – 2009-2010
NJLA Conference – April 2010

The governing Council of the American Library Association continued its longstanding tradition of considering a wide variety of issues of concern to ALA members. This year the selection included ALA’s budget woes, how to increase member participation in ALA activities, effective advocacy for libraries in troubled economic times, accessibility of library websites and other electronic services, healthcare reform, intellectual freedom statements, the planning process for a revised Strategic Plan for the Association, and Section 215 of the USA PATRIOT Act.

Just as it has affected all of our libraries, the economic downturn has pinched ALA’s ability to carry out its mission. Headquarters staff has struggled to maintain services while having to lay off a few staff and asking everyone else to take unpaid leave, reduce accrued vacation, and otherwise economize. The results include a smaller budget deficit than expected for this year but also slower service in a number of areas.

For some time, a high-level, high-prestige task force has been studying “**electronic member participation**”—a broad concept covering a wide variety of issues. The resulting report won wide praise; now many units are working out how they will implement their portions of the recommendations. One of the major responses was the establishment of “ALA Connect”: a place for members to connect with all of their responsibilities in ALA. For example, on one website one can see all of one’s committees, the people with whom one most frequently communicates, organized into virtual “communities”, and even store and share documents with other members. This was launched in March with little fanfare but has already been adopted by LITA and numerous members.

Four years ago, ALA went on record supporting the concept of “single payer” health insurance as a way to rein in costs and equalize benefits. With the new administration in Washington there is a new push for health insurance reform, some councilors wanted ALA to reiterate our previous stand in the hope of influencing the debate. However, the resolution was watered down to replace “single payer” with the much broader term “universal coverage”. After strenuous debate the term “**with single-payer option**” was reinstated and the resolution was adopted.

The Freedom to Read Foundation had a difficult year with the death of Judith Krug. In recognition of Ms. Krug’s dedicated service to IF across the nation, **chapter councilors spontaneously organized to have each state chapter adopt a memorial resolution for her.** These were collected and presented to her family. At the Midwinter meeting in Boston, **Barbara Jones was introduced as the new Executive Director.** In IF news, the Obama administration decided not to appeal the Appeals Court decision on the National Security Letter gag order. The burden of proof of necessity of a gag order is now on the government. FTRF has taken on a new case: balancing the “value” of speech versus government interest. The videos in question portray animal cruelty which is illegal everywhere, but the case was brought over distributing those videos for profit. Allowing the government to regulate content is the violation of intellectual freedom.

IF advocates disagreed over strategy while discussing “dueling motions” on the expiration of Section 215 of the USA PATRIOT Act at the end of this year. **Assuming that the section will be reauthorized, the Committee on Legislation advocated a series of specific reforms, but the Intellectual Freedom Committee called for the government to “sunset” the section (allow it to expire).** After discussing how to combine these efforts, Council agreed to a public statement calling for the sunset while advising the Washington Office staff to advocate the reforms if it becomes clear that the section will be reauthorized.

ALA is embarking on a process to develop a **new Strategic Plan for the organization**; an association has four elements: commonness, voluntarily, goals, people. There are three keys to make association great - 1) a reputation for value (a portfolio of good stuff) 3) an enjoyable culture (based on trust and high communication 3) a nimble infrastructure (that allows associations to quickly seize opportunities to create value). The process is including inviting comments from divisions and chapters.

President Camilla Aire reported on her initiatives. These are: frontline advocacy and advocacy for literacy; toolkits for frontline advocacy for different types of libraries; family literacy projects. The President has appointed a special committee for comprehensive review of ALA’s constitution and bylaws, with its purpose to identify inconsistencies and to work closely with Constitution and Bylaws Committee

President Elect Roberta Stevens reported on her initiatives. The initiatives are: frontline fundraising – relationships with library users and supporters; our authors, our libraries – 10-12 authors as spokespeople for libraries (which would include a toolkit on cultivating your local notables); “Why I need my library” campaign, focused mostly on kids and including videos and prizes

ALA Executive Director Keith Fiels’ gave his report; membership has had a slight decrease, 2.7%, attributable to a database cleanup. He also reported that the Library Support Staff Certification program was about to roll out. Further, he reported that Capwiz, which has been made available to state chapters, has been widely appreciated service.

A report was given by Betty Turock and Liz Bishoff on the **Spectrum Presidential Initiative**: National Initiative for Inclusivity in America’s Libraries. They announced that the goal is to raise \$1 million in 12 months, so that 100 scholarships could be offered. The Turock Family has donated the initial \$100,000 toward the \$500,000 needed. ALA is hoping that Chapters will become involved in the fundraising efforts as well.

A Resolution Declaring and Promoting 2010 as the Year of Cataloging Research passed unanimously. The Constitution and Bylaws Committee presented a recommendation for action on affiliate membership for Association for Jewish Libraries, with some discussion about ALA’s change in policies to include non-discrimination against gender identity and expression

The Committee on Legislation gave its report and gave its recommendations. **National Library Legislative Day will be the 2010 Library Advocacy Day and will be held on Tuesday, June 29th, 11 am.** After the rally, legislative visits be encouraged, www.ala.org/nlld. All librarians, trustees and Friends who might be interested are encouraged to attend, immediately after the ALA Annual meeting in Washington, DC

Cindy Czesak
NJ Chapter Councilor
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