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Lessons from the past

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Examining the legislative and political history of Oregon's library community makes one wonder if there is anything new under the sun. Consider the following issues:

- The latest twist in per capita aid, "One to Get Ready: Read!," faces a tough time in Salem this coming session—a similar picture when the idea of state aid was introduced (and defeated) in the 1945 Legislature.
- Federal library funding legislation is passed at the last minute in 1996—reminiscent of the nascent

LSA legislation heatedly debated at an OLA Executive Board meeting in October, 1952.

- Threats to civil liberties stretch our perception of who we are as librarians and what we stand for—thoughts well articulated by Dr. Raymond Muse in his comments at the PNLA conference in 1956.

Lessons from the Past

by Janet Webster
Oregon State University's
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- The library community is confronting property tax limitations—just as Nan Heim did during her debut as a lobbyist in 1978.
- We battle with censorship measures—as we did in 1983 with a failed bill that attempted to define community standards for dealing with obscene materials.

Librarians in Oregon are politically active. In the past, we did it best when focused on a common cause, and then tended to drift back to our local interests. In the 1990s, we work together continuously knowing that sooner or later, we all share the issues and the users. We have learned that there is strength in our community. But, we can still learn from past efforts on both the federal and state level.

LIBRARY SERVICES ACT & STATE AID IN THE 1950s:

The original act, passed in 1956 as Public Law 597 of the Eighty-fourth Congress, authorized funds for "the extension of library facilities into rural areas" (Chaney, 1960). Rural was defined as areas with a population under 10,000. Authorization did not mean the funds were appropriated; the appropriation, whittled down from the original \$7.5 million to a little over \$2 million, came through later that year. Oregon's role in the passage of this historic legislation was prominent as Edith Green, one of our congress people of the day, became the bill's sponsor in the House of Representatives. The story of the political machinations are well covered in Holley and Schremser (1983). A letter announcing the increased appropriations the next year arrived from Edith Green to then OLA president, Cora Miller, and appeared in the July 1957 *Oregon Library News*.



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The OLA supported an ambitious state aid bill in 1955 that would have provided for the development and improvement of county and regional libraries. The proposed legislation resulted from a three-year study by OLA and included items besides funding: the appointment of an advisory board for grants, possible standards for grant recipients, local effort requirements, limits to amount of grants (Eaton, 1960). The bill failed, but a simpler one passed in 1957 appropriating state funds to match available federal ones.

THE EXPANSION OF LSA TO LSCA IN THE 1960s:

Lyndon Johnson signed the Library Services and Construction Act into law on February 11, 1964 ending a long debate over the program's expansion. Part of that debate, the Senate segment, started shortly after 1:00 pm on November 22, 1963. Many of us vividly remember where we were when President Kennedy was assassinated; probably, few of us realize that legislation crucial to libraries was linked in time to this event. As Oregon's Senator Wayne Morse, the bill's sponsor, interrupted the proceedings to say: "I should like to interrupt a moment to say that if ever there was an hour when all America should pray, this is the hour" (Holley and Schremser, 1983), many of us were in shock.

The bill that had been facing serious challenges, particularly over the construction clause, sailed through after the debate was so abruptly postponed. Charlie Lee, a Congressional staff member, observed the following: "The bill passed as a memorial tribute to President Kennedy. It's a macabre association but it did save the construction authority. In a sense, every library in the country that was built or renovated since that time has been a partial Presidential library by implication" (Holley and Schremser, 1983). The 1964 LSCA provided funding for construction as well

as operations and lifted the rural restriction. The legislation was expanded further in 1966 to include interlibrary cooperation.

Back in Oregon, the library community kept working on streamlining the implementation of the LSA program and working towards more stable funding. It appears to have been a time of learning how to use federal programs to their best advantage. Yet, the 1960s also saw the establishment of OLA's Intellectual Freedom Committee, perhaps an indicator of a rise in challenges. Momentum started building in the later part of the decade for greater cooperation among all libraries. Planning was seen as critical to any organized effort for more state funding and broader guidelines; OLA and the State Library worked diligently on a statewide library network plan holding meetings throughout the state. The final plan was completed in 1969, laying the groundwork for legislative battles in the 1970s.

THE 1970s STATE AID FOR LIBRARIES STRUGGLE:

"Legislative bills to provide state aid to public libraries were introduced in the 1973, 1975, and 1977 sessions. Each attempted to provide some type of per capita funding along with development project grants aimed at cooperation among libraries for expanded services. The bills received friendly hearings from the education committees to which each were assigned. However, the funding priorities for the state from the general fund never seemed to extend to libraries when the bills reached the ways and means committees.... Per capita at \$0.25 per head and \$300,000 for development grants were the major monetary sections of the 1977 state aid bill. Administration of the program was to be through the Oregon State Library Board of Trustees assisted by an advisory group of public librarians. Again the early hearings were favorable, but the ways and means committee declined to include the per capita funding. However, the first state aid bill was passed and became law in July 1977" (Eaton, 1980). The 1977 legislation was a watershed. Building on this success, \$0.21 per capita funding was passed in 1979.

Familiar strategies lead to these successes.

- 1) OLA's Legislative and Development Committees (they were separate in the 1970s) worked in tandem on getting legislation drafted to provide state aid. This work gave OLA solid background on how the Legislature worked. It also made the committees' members realize that a professional lobbyist was needed, and Ms. Nina Cleveland was hired for the 1973 session.
- 2) Communicating the needs of Oregon's libraries to legislators was critical. Legislative candidates were surveyed, and contacted by local librarians. Position papers on state aid were composed and circulated.
- 3) OLA courted sympathetic legislators who would support the bill once it hit the floor.

"Not only have the librarians performed in their passive role as housekeepers of liberty, but they that have also played a very active role in the realm of civil liberties. While so many Americans in their sincere fear of totalitarianism, or in their zeal for political gain fed by this fear, have been making serious inroads upon the fundamental civil liberties, the librarians have been taking their position forthrightly and courageously on one of the great documents of Americanism, the Library Bill of Rights. ... They have not only performed their professional obligation of defending and preserving the First Amendment, but they have discharged a civic duty and an intellectual imperative as well in exercising the liberties guaranteed therein. ...

As Judge Learned Hand ably stated it, "Liberty lies in the hearts of men and women; if it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can ever do much to help. While it lies there it needs no constitution, no law, no court to save it."

If this devotion to liberty on the part of our people perishes, librarianship as you understand it will have passed from the land. You will become collectors, cataloguers and disseminators of propaganda rather than the librarians of a free people."

— Raymond Muse
"Civil Liberties and the Librarian."
PNLA Quarterly 21(2):(1957): 78-84.

- 4) Extensive outreach was conducted to the League of Oregon Cities and the Association of Oregon Counties. OLA exhibited at each group's annual meeting and prepared a resolution supporting state aid that librarians could use with their local governments.
- 5) OLA met with the interim committee on local government during the 1975-1977 lull. This contact prompted the committee to draft the 1977 legislation as a committee bill.
- 6) OLA's Legislative Committee organized a legislative network in the fall of 1976. The group included librarians, trustees, members of the American Association of University Women, civic leaders, and local officials.
- 7) At annual conferences in the 1970s, sessions on state aid and legislative workshops were common elements.

UPS AND DOWNS IN THE 1980s:

Oregon libraries made gains on issues other than funding while always fighting to preserve state fund-

Landmarks in the Oregon Library Political Arena

- 1945: OLA supports the State Aid Bill which fails.
- 1955: A measure providing that all State Library Board members be appointed passes the legislature as does one permitting establishment of regional public library boards.
- 1956: Library Services Act passes Congress.
- 1957: Mrs. Eugene Kelty, the first OLA legislative representative is employed.
- 1963: Library Services and Construction Act passes Congress with outstanding support from Wayne Morse, Maurine Neuberger, Edith Green, Robert Duncan and Al Ullman.
- 1971: Legislature allocates all LSCA funds to the operation of the State Library even though OLA objects.
- 1973: Ms. Nina Cleveland is hired as first paid lobbyist. Laws are passed allowing the formation of library districts along school and community college district boundaries.
- 1975: ORS Chapter 357 is completely revised. SB444, giving some protection to libraries from prosecution under obscene publications laws, passes the Legislature. Laws are passed allowing the formation of library districts in metropolitan areas.
- 1977: State Aid passes the Legislature.
- 1978: Nan Heim is hired as OLA's lobbyist.
- 1979: State Aid amended to include per capita.
- 1983: Per capita is cut.
- 1985: OLA sponsors its first Legislative Day with an ice cream social in the capitol.
- 1986: The political action committee forms.
- 1987: Per capita assistance increases 30%.
- 1992: Measure 5 passes limiting the tax rates for cities and counties. OLA helps defeat Measure 9 which would have limited the civil liberties of gays and lesbians.
- 1993: Oregon LINK passes the Legislature.
- 1995: The LINK project is expanded and its sunset clause removed.
- 1996: Measure 47 passes.

ing. The Public Records Law Exemption for Library Circulation Records passed in 1981 thanks to support from the OLA Legislative Network. The 1983 session was brutal. Oregon was in the midst of a major recession, and libraries were looking at shrinking budgets as was the state. So, Governor Atiyeh recommended cutting all per capita funding and replacing it with LSCA funds. OLA opposed this and had difficulty explaining the intricacies of general funds, federal funds and local responsibility to legislators intent on reducing local assistance programs (Stephenson, 1983). While per capita was cut, it was not zeroed out and OLA could claim a partial victory in a hard fought battle. Besides funding, the 1983 session saw the passage of a bill allowing cities to appoint library boards and the tabling of an obscenity bill that would have provided for local rather than state standards for measuring obscene materials.

Things did improve as the decade wore on and OLA got even more active. OLA held its first legislative day with an ice cream party during the 1985 National Library Week, the beginning of an important political tradition. The next year, at the OLA Conference, Donna Selle solicited the first contributions to the Oregon Library PAC, now the People for Oregon Libraries, and Carol Hildebrand wrote about it in the *PNLA Quarterly* (Hildebrand, 1990).

LESSONS

All this activity over the decades leads into our actions of the 1990s. We are not creating new strategies to be politically effective; we are using the tried and true ones of talking to people, articulating our needs, participating in the democratic process. History shows we can accomplish our goals, but there will always be frustrations and setbacks sprinkled in with the successes. **Q**

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