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Senate Bill 20: How a good idea became a law

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Senate Bill 20:

How a Good Idea Became a Law

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When you take a tour of the State Capitol you might walk away with a handout describing "how an idea becomes a law." It explains the Oregon legislative process with a lot of neat boxes, arrows and cute cartoon figures. It makes it look easy.

Well, this is the story of how a good idea really became a law. Senate Bill 20, the Oregon LINK library resource sharing bill, passed in 1993. It was, and remains, the most significant piece of Oregon library legislation since state aid for public libraries was first enacted in the 1970's. The story of SB 20 is an interesting one. Like a lot of important legislation, it was a real nail-biter. It took a lot of help from a lot of different people: legislators, lobbyists, librarians and library supporters to make it happen. Others might have seen it differently, but here's how it happened from my vantage point.

THE CALL

On Saturday, July 31, 1993, I thought my 1993 legislative session was over. The legislators were meeting through the weekend, determined to wrap up their most pressing business and get out of town. We had passed a few of our library bills in the session, but not the most important one, SB 20.

That Saturday morning was when I got the call. The voice on the other end was excited. It was one of OLA Lobbyist Nan Heim's associates. The House Appropriations Committee was meeting that afternoon. And SB 20 was not dead.

In fact, SB 20 was on the agenda for the Committee's afternoon work session. This was a huge surprise, because it seemed certain that SB 20 was finished, at least for the 1993 session. The bill had passed the Senate, run by the Democrats that year, but it had stalled out in the Republican-controlled House. There had been a nasty break-up of the Ways and Means Committee, normally a joint committee made up of House and Senate members, into two separate appropriations committees. The bill was bottled up in the House, and there we expected it to die.

But, SB 20 had one last shot that Saturday. I got into my suit and tie, and rushed to the Capitol. The bill was already being discussed when I got there. Representative Ted Calouri from Beaverton spoke favorably of the bill and there was no real opposition. A deal had been struck, as often is the case, before the work session. The Chair of the Committee, Repre-

sentative John Minnis from Troutdale, gavelled the bill out of committee, but not before adding an amendment, a sunset clause that would mean the 1995 Legislature would have to look at the issue again.

Even with the addition of the sunset clause, those of us there were jubilant, because we knew our major goal for the 1993 session had been achieved. The vote a few days later in the full House and Senate was a foregone conclusion. In carrying the bill on the House floor, Representative Calouri stated, "This is a good deal for local libraries and a good deal for the State Library."

The "good deal" was a resource sharing program for Oregon libraries, including a network of reference referral centers and reimbursement for libraries that loaned more materials to other libraries than they borrowed. This would be financed with federal dollars that were freed from the State Library budget. The federal dollars in turn were to be replaced with an "assessment" on state agencies that were served by the State Library. It was an ingenious financing scheme, because it didn't require additional dollars from the General Fund. It actually saved some General Fund dollars. This financing idea was probably the biggest factor in SB 20's success. But where did the idea come from? The fact is, the idea at the core of SB 20 came out of nowhere.

THE GIFT

The idea of financing the State Library through an assessment on state agencies that used the State Library came unannounced and unsolicited. It arrived in a report from a subcommittee appointed by Governor Barbara Roberts. Intended or not (and we may never know), it was a gift.

When Barbara Roberts became Governor in 1991, Ballot Measure 5 had just passed, meaning big changes were in store for state government. One of her responses to this was to undertake a comprehensive review of all state programs. Subcommittees were formed, comprised of state government officials and citizens, and agencies made lengthy presentations describing their programs and future plans. The State Library made its presentation and anxiously awaited the recommendations of the subcommittee.

One of the recommendations came as a complete surprise. It had not been part of our presentation, nor had it been discussed in our dealings with the subcommittee. But there it was in the final report: "Investigate using the central government service charge to finance state library operations."

It took us awhile to realize what a great idea this was. When we first thought about it, it seemed kind of scary. Having all state agencies pay us directly from their budgets for our services would mean we would be much more accountable for providing quality services to all of state government.

POLITICAL
the results

We got the subcommittee report in December of 1991. The major recommendation for the State Library was to "restructure, move or combine functions with another agency." The agency that the Governor's staff had in mind was the Secretary of State's Office. This recommendation was one that the State Library Board strongly opposed, and we knew it would be the one that the Governor would work hardest to make happen. The other recommendations of the report would have to wait, while the State Library Board mobilized to resist the move to place the Library under the Secretary of State.

The idea that we might free up the LSCA funds for resource sharing, by replacing them with an assessment on our state government customers, might have languished, had it not been for an OLA-inspired planning initiative that was just starting to gear up at the end of 1991.

THE CHAMPION

What caused Senate Bill 20 to happen, more than anything else, was a textbook act of political involvement carried out by some librarians in Corvallis. It was the kind of involvement OLA Lobbyist Nan Heim has forever been goading reluctant librarians to engage in. In 1990, when Senator Cliff Trow of Corvallis was facing a tough re-election campaign, librarians were there to help, making phone calls, distributing campaign literature, raising some money: the usual grunt work of a political campaign. So when Mel George, Deborah Jacobs, and Pat Grace sat down with the newly re-elected Senator a month after the election, he was very receptive to what they had to say.

One of the things they had to say was that Oregon might benefit from a "blue ribbon committee" of legislators and citizens who would look at a broad range of issues relating to improving library services in the state. That idea stuck. Senator Trow thought it was an excellent idea. By the end of the meeting, librarians had a champion.

Senator Trow worked with OLA to try to pass a bill in the 1991 Legislative Session that would create a "blue ribbon committee" to look at library issues. When the bill failed, Senator Trow did not give up. He used his position on the Joint Interim Education Committee to create such a committee as part of the Interim Committee work plan for 1992.

The committee, chaired by Senator Trow, was made up of four legislators and ten citizens. Nine of the citizens were librarians: Fran Cardoza, Lynn Chmelir, Ginnie Cooper, Deanna Draper, Mel George, Deborah Jacobs, June Knudson, Jim Scheppke, and Maureen Sloan. The tenth member was Freda Vars from Corvallis, at the time a library trustee.

The "Joint Interim Committee on Education Work Group on Oregon Library Services" began meeting in February of 1992 and delivered a report on November 30th of that year. Leading the work of the

committee behind the scenes was an extraordinarily committed legislative staff member named Jan Borgen. In developing the plans that would lead to SB 20, it was Jan who first realized that using the idea that had been generated by the Governor's subcommittee on the Library was the key to achieving our resource sharing agenda. She saw right away that if we could deliver a proposal that did not require more state General Fund dollars, that we would have an excellent chance of success. Jan was dogged in her pursuit of the idea of instituting a state library assessment on state agencies that would free federal funds that could be used for library resource sharing purposes. It was Jan's work with budget analysts and other key players in the budget process that paved the way for SB 20.

THE SESSION

When SB 20 was introduced by Senator Trow at the beginning of the 1993 legislative session, it was one of four bills that the Joint Interim Education Committee process generated. But because it was the only one of the three that dealt with money, we knew it would be the toughest to pass.

The Oregon Library Association, led by President Deborah Jacobs and Legislative Committee Chair Carol Hildebrand, did an excellent job of mobilizing the OLA membership to get behind SB 20 and the other three bills. OLA Legislative Day that year was the biggest and best ever. Nan Heim and Jody Fischer were doing their usual outstanding work to facilitate and guide OLA's advocacy. The State Library Board, led by Anne Carter and George Bell, did their part to lobby for all the bills. Most importantly, our champion, Senator Trow was working hard to secure passage of SB 20.

Another Senator, Stan Bunn of Newberg, helped us see that the bill's chances would be strengthened if the assessment on state agencies could be phased in over two state biennia, rather than trying to do it in one biennium. With OLA's support, Bunn sponsored an amendment to SB 20 in the Ways and Means Committee that would accomplish the phase-in. The amendment solidified support in the Senate. SB 20 passed the Oregon Senate in May of 1993 by a unanimous vote.

The House was another matter, but thanks to determined efforts by Nan Heim and many OLA members, the bill was rescued in the last days of the session as I have recounted above. The final House vote on SB 20, in August 1993, was also unanimous. The sunset clause that was added by the House Appropriations Committee caused us a great deal of uncertainty and nervousness over the next two years. But when we got to the next session of the Legislature in 1995, the bill to remove the sunset clause sailed through the process without any real difficulty. The heavy lifting had already been done in the 1993 session.

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Staying Safe

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need to understand and follow the guidelines for safe political activity. The Executive Board needs to work within organizational limitations such as tax status, involve membership in the discussion of principles and political positions, and present a united library front to the rest of the world.

Limitations, if addressed and understood, need not hamper our political activity. They can lead to a better understanding of the political arena and what involvement really means. Differences in opinion precipitate confrontation and possibly a divided front. Open discussion is critical so our actions do not appear as a flight of fancy of the most liberal, vocal, or active of the members. Separating the political activity of individuals who happen to be librarians from the political activity of OLA reflects an understanding of roles and limitations.

We have many friends who support libraries on general principle. The OLA's commitment to be visible and articulate in the political arena will alienate some of those important friends. Though difficult to alienate part of a library's constituency, we must continue to focus on our values to succeed politically. Compromise may be necessary and works best if all sides bring commitment, vision and conviction to the arena.

The library community cannot afford to sit on the political sidelines in this day and age, when property tax measures may decimate budgets, or an angry citizens' group wants to limit who can read what, or opportunities for statewide cooperation emerge needing legislative approval. On the other hand, libraries cannot afford to lose credibility as broad, inclusive community institutions. The OLA is quite far along the political activity spectrum, and we are doing much to translate the core values of librari-

ship into political reality. But, we can all do more. And, we can do it right. **Q**

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Law

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THE LESSON

The events I have tried to describe here are already fading from my memory. More than anything, I wanted to recall the names of those who made SB 20 happen. I've tried to include the most important names here, but there were, of course, many others who made a phone call, testified at a hearing, wrote a letter, or came to Legislative Day. Everyone's efforts were important to our success.

But the key lesson to be learned from this story is the same one that Nan Heim has been trying to teach librarians and library supporters for years: Nothing happens without a champion, and it is up to us to make a legislator into a champion.

Had it not been for the fact that librarians in Corvallis were willing to spend a few hours to work in Senator Trow's campaign in 1990, SB 20 would probably never have happened. Had it not been for the fact that Mel George and Deborah Jacobs and Pat Grace made an effort to meet with Senator Trow in December of 1990 to discuss ways to improve library services in Oregon, SB 20 would probably never have happened.

The lesson of SB 20 is that to achieve major progress for libraries in Oregon, all of us in the library community need to be willing to engage in the political process. And if we can do that, there will be many more legislative victories to come. **Q**

Postscript: How a Good Law Stayed a Law

As Jim mentioned in his story on Senate Bill 20, the original bill contained a sunset clause. The 1995 Legislative Session saw a flurry of activity to repeal this clause so LINK would live on. Here is the short, but sweet, history of HB 2172 (retold with additions from OLA Hotline 1(11)).

OLA LEGISLATIVE DAY

Activities on January 19th focused on LINK as OLA members from around the state visited legislators and staff.

HOUSE HEARING

HB2172 went first to a House Committee chaired by Rep. Dennis Luke (R-Bend) who was very supportive. Jim Scheppke, George Bell and Nan Heim met with every committee member. At the hearing January 20, OLA members, including Anne Billeter and Deborah Jacobs, testified in support of HB 2172. The committee voted a unanimous "do pass".

HOUSE VOTE

OLA members answered a Network Alert by contacting their Representatives to support HB 2172. It passed the House 59 to 0 on January 28, with Rep. Barbara Ross (D-Corvallis) carrying the bill.

SENATE HEARING

HB2172 headed to a Senate Committee, which held a hearing February 16. We visited committee members, and Deb Carver put out an Alert for local contacts. Jim Scheppke and Carol Hildebrand testified and the committee voted a unanimous "do pass."

WAYS & MEANS SUBCOMMITTEE

Once again, Jim, George and Nan made the rounds of committee members. On February 23, the subcommittee, chaired by Rep. Bob Montgomery (R-Hood River), heard HB2172 along with the State library's budget bill. Deb Carver, Deborah

Jacobs and Ed House testified. Sen. Shirley Stull (R-Keizer) moved the bill to full Ways & Means with another unanimous "do pass."

FULL WAYS & MEANS COMMITTEE:

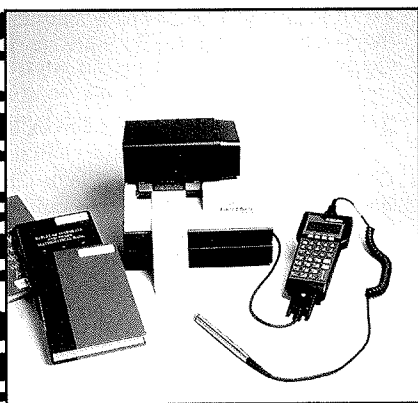
The full committee considered the bill on March 6. The co-chairs were both supportive, especially Denny Jones (R-Ontario). It once again passed out of committee with a "do pass" recommendation.

SENATE VOTE

The Network did not have time to roll into action, but relied on previous hard work. Sen. Stull carried the bill to the Senate on March 7 where it passed with 30 ayes.

GOVERNOR'S SIGNATURE:

Governor Kitzhaber signed HB2172, allowing for the continuation and expansion of the successful LINK program.



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