

National Library Legislative Day 2006 Report

Ted Schwitzner and I attended the National Library Legislative Day in Washington, May 2. I arrived on Sunday, April 30, and was able to attend the Pre-Conference, a two-hour session at the new Washington office of the ALA. The session was entitled “Introduction to National Library Legislative Day: Why Your Participation is Important: What to Do and How to Do It,” or “Lobbying 101”. I would strongly recommend this session for anyone doing this for the first time.

After three years of attending these legislative days, Ted Schwitzner is becoming a veteran of these lobbying efforts and understands the importance of such work: “One of the underlying messages of the day is that advocacy at the federal level is most effective when you make connections and develop relationships with legislative aides, assistants, and counsels. These are the people who will be in the best position to fill in a legislator on what people's concerns are, and they can help move concerns along considerably, making sure that the right issues get to the legislator. A complementary component to that goes with the adage that "all politics are local": that is doing advocacy at the local level, by visiting or writing district offices and creating relationships there.

Monday, May 1 was the ALA Briefing Day, at the Holiday Inn on Capitol Hill. Several speakers made presentations about meeting with congressmen and/or the staff. They also went over the key messages that we were to present to the congressional offices. The following is taken directly from the handouts provided by ALA (for more information see <http://www.ala.org/ala/issues/fedissues.htm>)

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- Fund the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) at the President’ request of \$220.855 million.
- Fund the Improving Literacy Through School Libraries at \$100 million.
- Restore \$2.5 million funding for EPA libraries, which contain much information not found anywhere else.
- Thank the congressman/woman for preserving the E-rate program, which makes telecommunications services affordable to public libraries and schools.
- Support S. 2360 that seek to establish net neutrality, maintaining equal access to the Internet for all content providers such as libraries. The fear is that broadband companies will sell faster access to those who can afford it.
- Although there is not a bill yet, preserve fair use and educational use of TV news and public affairs programming by voting against any “broadcast flag” which would prevent distribution of broadcasts through the internet. The message is to exempt public affairs and education programming from such copy protection.
- Support funding of the Government Printing Office and federal depository library program
- Although there is not a bill yet, support “orphan works” legislation to facilitate use of copyrighted works whose owners cannot be found or identified.
- Support the bi-partisan “Executive Branch Reform Act of 2006” HR 5112, which would limit the use of “pseudo-classification” markings such as “sensitive but unclassified” and “for official use only.”

- Urge Senators to schedule a vote on S. 494, the “Federal Employee Protection of Disclosures Act,” which would protect national security whistleblowers.

Of these issues, the key issues relating to academic libraries are the LSTA funding, the intellectual property issues and copyright, net neutrality, and access to government information. For more information on these issues see <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlissues/washingtonwatch>

There was an ACRL Legislative Day luncheon with guest speaker Rodney Petersen, a policy analyst with EDUCAUSE. He spoke on safety, security and privacy, and the responsible use of information technology in higher education.

On Monday evening there was an Illinois delegate dinner at the Capitol Hill Club. A professional lobbyist, Ronald L. Kelley, of the Livingston Group, was the guest speaker and was very interesting, in spite of the late hour.

Tuesday, May 2

I visited the following congressional offices and spoke with the congressional aides in each case. Usually there were about 4 to 6 of us, and we took turns bringing up the above issues. I met with:

- John Marshall, legislative assistant for Rep. Bobby Rush
- Lauren Aronson, legislative assistant for Rep. Rahm Emanuel
- Emily Chibnall, legislative assistant for Rep. Dan Lipinski
- Sirat K. Attapit, legislative assistant to Sen. Dick Durbin; and Steven Robinson, “Albert Einstein Fellow,” and legislative assistant for Sen. Barack Obama
This was a joint session to which all ILA members were invited.
- Bernard Glenn-Moore, CBCF Legislative Fellow for Rep. Danny Davis

In addition to the meeting with Rep. Lipinski's aide, Emily Chibnall, Ted Schwitzner also met with the following:

- Rep. Judy Biggert and her assistant, Brian Colgan
- Kate Anderson (for Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert)
- Staff for Rep. Henry Hyde, who provided the group with passes into the House and Senate chambers. “Though this is my third Legislative Day trip, I had not been into the Capitol before. The Senate was in session and watching the business of the day take place actually gave me a new perspective for the whole process. Particularly fascinating was seeing Senators and aides moving quickly in and out of the chamber for various reasons, as well as seeing the many side conversations.”

In these groups, as an academic librarian Ted usually spoke about the copyright and network neutrality issues.

A reception followed at the Rayburn House Office Building at the end of a long day. Sen. Durbin was a co-recipient (with Sen. Larry Craig of Idaho) of the FOLUSA Public Service Award at the May 2 reception.

This is a very interesting and educational experience for anyone wishing to make the trip. It is a reminder of how much what we sometimes take for granted depends on legislative action on the national level. Many people were there “lobbying” for the first time, and the ALA Washington office and the ILA staff prepared us well. I would strongly encourage LIBRAS members to participate in this activity.

Sincerely,

Sally Anderson
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