

Report on ALA Midwinter Council Business

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ALA Council conducted its business in a more orderly fashion in Philadelphia than I have seen in some time.

Meeting in its capacity as the ALA-APA (Allied Professional Association) Council --- already being referred to by some as “Alaapa,” Council adopted recommended amendments to the APA bylaws. These changes were the subject of considerable traffic on the Council’s electronic list between the Atlanta and Philadelphia meetings. Discussions continued during the ALA-APA transition team’s presentation on Sunday at the joint Council/Executive Board/Membership Information Session. Multiple drafts of the changes were circulating on Sunday and Monday, right up to the moment of the final vote. Also adopted was a five year business plan to guide the development of the ALA-APA and (hopefully) insure its financial viability. In addition to a start-up loan of \$250,000 from ALA funds, the new ALA-APA will also be soliciting donations from ALA members to help it get started, to the tune of \$48,750 per year. Executive Director Keith Michael Fields estimates that this goal can be met each year if 3250 members contribute \$15 a piece. These donations would not be tax-deductible.

As usual at Council, we spent a lot of time listening to financial reports from the ALA Endowment trustees, from BARC, and from the Treasurer. The Endowment trustees proposed, and Council adopted, a change in the endowment policy that will make it easier for divisions and round tables to access and use the interest and dividends earned by their long-term investments. The treasurer, Liz Bishoff, reported on last year’s actuals and the current year’s actuals so far. At this time revenues are down but still ahead of projections, and expenditures are less than projected, which is good. However with the unsettled state of the economy, it behooves us to budget carefully and watch expenses carefully. The report of BARC on the process for next year’s budget, also echoed this theme. Every expense must be carefully calculated and justified. Programs and services that do not pay for themselves will be especially scrutinized.

Council passed two resolutions in support of beleaguered library institutions that are facing possible closure, the School of Information Resources and Library Services at the University of Arizona and the State Library of Florida. One member of Council suggested, somewhat acerbically, that a copy of the resolution in support of the State Library of Florida should be sent to the governor's mother.

Two other significant resolutions came before Council. One resolution, sponsored by Ann Sparanese and Michael Gorman, asked President Bush to support the United Nations in efforts to mediate the crisis before initiating any military action against Iraq; it also urged libraries and librarians to fulfill their role by providing materials and programs examining all sides of the issue. The resolution was defeated. Many councilors stated their personal views in support of the resolution but felt it was not appropriate (at least at this time) for ALA to take a position on the issue. In this instance, I can truly say that I voted my conscience by voting in favor of the resolution. The resolution did not make a statement for or against war with Iraq; it merely urged that all possibilities short of war be exhausted first. When I consider what we stand to lose when resources that could go towards the needs of this nation (including libraries) are diverted to support a war, and the crushing burden of debt that our children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren will be paying for years to come, I do not think it is unreasonable to say that war should be our last resort.

The other significant resolution was an attempt to rescind the resolution passed by Council in Atlanta deploring the recent destruction of Palestinian libraries in the escalating conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. The resolution to rescind was defeated. In the debate it was pointed out that the resolution did not take sides in the conflict, but simply reiterated ALA's belief that the destruction of any library is at all times a deplorable event.

Finally, the major IF action of Council in Philadelphia came in two resolutions from the Committee on Legislation (COL). COL introduced, and the IFC co-sponsored, a resolution on the USA Patriot Act and Related Measures That Infringe on the Rights of Library Users. Various drafts of the resolution were circulated and discussed among

Councilors during the conference and many units of ALA sent comments and suggestions to COL before a final draft was presented to Council at its final session on Wednesday. IFC worked closely with COL on the IF context of the resolution. The final document, reprinted in this issue of the IFRT Report, asks Congress to exercise its oversight and require the Justice Department to report how it is implementing the sections that impact on libraries and library users. It asks Congress to hold hearings to determine how the law is affecting libraries and library users. And it urges Congress to amend or change those sections of the law that are a “present danger to the constitutional rights” of library users.

A second resolution from COL dealt with setting up a process for determining what and when unclassified information should be removed from government web sites, including an appeals process, and a method for storing such information in a usable and accessible format for historical reference. This resolution was the first of several which are expected to come out of the work of the Restricted Access to Government Information (RAGI) Task Force formed last Midwinter to report through COL on issues regarding the removal of information from government web sites. The RAGI Task Force issued a draft report to COL at Midwinter and a final report and recommendations are expected by spring, with actions items coming from COL at Annual in Toronto.