

Report from the 2006 Chair of IFRT

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I'd like to highlight a few things that happened at the Midwinter Meeting in San Antonio that I think are of interest to the IF community.

I. At the Midwinter Meeting, ALA Council voted to adopt a Resolution in Support of Academic Freedom:

http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/statementspols/ifresolutions/academic_freedom.htm

This resolution is a response to the “Academic Bill of Rights” that is being promoted to state legislatures and academic institutions by David Horowitz and his Center for the Study of Popular Culture, a self-described conservative nonprofit organization. ABOR would impose standards other than relevant scholarly standards on academic institutions in relation to course content, classroom conduct, research process, and hiring and tenure decisions. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and other scholarly organizations are on record in opposition to ABOR. This is an issue of serious concern to academic institutions nationwide, and has implications for academic librarians who have tenure and for collection development in academic libraries. The IFRT Executive Committee voted to support this resolution. Additional background information is available at the following links:

David Horowitz:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Horowitz

Center for the Study of Popular Culture:

<http://cspc.org/>

FrontPageMag.com:

<http://frontpagemag.com/>

Political Intrusions into the Academy:

<http://www.aaup.org/Issues/ABOR/Political%20intrusion1.htm>

also:

<http://cas.umkc.edu/aaup/abor.htm>

<http://www.unitedfacultyofflorida.org/pdf/Summer2005-Update.pdf>

<http://www.studentsforacademicfreedom.org/archive/2005/November2005/BSUWolfeLectureTranscript110305.htm>

II. At the Midwinter Meeting ALA Council voted to adopt a Resolution on the USA Patriot Act Reauthorization:

<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/statementspols/ifresolutions/patriotreauthorization.htm>

This resolution was presented by the Committee on Legislation with the support and endorsement of the Intellectual Freedom Committee. It is the latest in a series of resolutions that ALA Council has adopted to lobby for revisions in Sections 215 and 505 of the USA Patriot Act, to limit the reauthorization of Sections 215 and 505 to four years, and to urge Congress to intensify its oversight of the USA Patriot Act and other government surveillance programs. The IFRT Executive Committee voted to support this resolution in principle.

During the Council debate of this resolution, Lynne Bradley of the ALA Washington Office was asked to comment on this issue, and whether ALA and its allies had any realistic expectation of influencing Congress. Bradley reported that the library community is recognized for its efforts in shaping public opinion and Congressional action on this issue. Unfortunately we have subsequently learned that the Republican members who had cooperated in a bipartisan effort to add some safeguards and protections for civil liberties to the legislation have come to a “compromise” with the Administration that would allow the Patriot Act provisions to be renewed for another four years. ALA has issued a statement opposing this compromise language as insufficient to meet its concerns, but it appears at this time that the legislation will be adopted.

<http://www.ala.org/ala/pressreleases2006/february/patriotcomp.htm>

III. The ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee held two hearings at the Midwinter Meeting, one on proposed guidelines for implementing RFID technology in libraries, and one on a Q&A in support of the recently revised Interpretation on Labels. The committee received considerable comment on both these documents, and will be reviewing the comments and revising the documents at its spring meeting in Chicago. IFRT Executive Committee members attended both hearings. The IFRT liaison to IFC, Margaret Rohdy, will be attending the spring meeting.

IV. The Office for Intellectual Freedom of ALA has received a Ford Foundation grant to fund a workshop to train librarians on intellectual freedom issues and First Amendment law. The workshop will be held at ALA HQ in Chicago April 4-6. The chairs of all state chapter IFCs have been invited to attend, and their costs will be covered by the Ford Foundation grant. The purpose of the workshop is to train IFC chairs to go back to their state chapters and conduct at least two similar workshops for chapter members.

V. During the Midwinter Meeting, the trustees of the Merritt Fund organized a “Conversation” to discuss ways in which ALA provides support for individual library workers. The Merritt Fund was established many years ago by ALA to provide financial assistance to library workers who find themselves in difficulty and/or in danger of losing

their jobs due to standing up for intellectual freedom or due to discrimination in the workplace. The fund is supported by voluntary contributions from ALA members and is administered by three trustees.

Other segments of ALA participated to explain how their work benefits library workers. Those included were Judith Krug, Office for Intellectual Freedom; Jenifer Grady, ALA-Allied Professional Association; Tessa Perry, Office for Diversity; Julie Brewer, Recruitment Assembly; Ma'lis Wendt, Merritt Fund Trustee; and Pam Klipsch, IFRT. Other interested members also attended. The group agreed to keep working together with the goal of providing a program at annual conference to inform ALA members of the resources available to them through ALA.

VI. As reported elsewhere, IFRT Program Committee Chair Lauren Christos presented the plans for the IFRT-sponsored IF program at 2006 Annual Conference in New Orleans. We are indebted to the American Indian Library Association for co-sponsoring this program, and to AILA members who agreed to serve on the program committee and assisted in planning the program and securing speakers.

This is an important and timely topic. The Washington Post, in an article published on February 2, 2006, quoted Joe Garcia, the new president of the National Congress of American Indians, who presented a "State of the Indian Nations" address at the National Press Club. Garcia said the Indian Nations face four areas of great challenge: law enforcement, public safety and illegal immigration on tribal lands; health care (Native Americans' average life expectancy is five years less than other Americans); education and the economy (only 50% of Native students complete high school); and the Indian trust lawsuit (a class action suit against the federal government for mismanaging Indian lands held in trust that has now dragged on for ten years). Stereotypes and misinformation about Native Americans continue to prevent equitable solutions to these problems.

Prior to the program, IFRT is sponsoring a membership reception. The reception will be held in a room adjacent to the program room in the Morial Convention Center. The annual IF awards sponsored by IFRT will be presented at this reception, and IFRT members who are attending conference are invited to meet the award winners and our program speakers, and to enjoy a light lunchtime buffet.