

From the Chair



The Truth as we know it

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When I see a movie with my kids, the discussion afterwards often leads me to wonder whether we saw the same movie. One looks at cinematography (the artist), one at the acting (the actress), one at the score (the musician), and one is a director looking at the scene setup. So the movie could be great, awful, indifferent, the best thing since sliced bread, or the end of cinema as we know it. Their point of view is important to each person who forms an opinion, and the bias of each individual leads them to their opinion on the problem at hand. Can a movie be good if it doesn't satisfy all these people? Well, most movies will not satisfy *all* these people, but still can be a great movie if it satisfies on *many* levels—if not all.

Closer to home, ALA members, along with the rest of the country, have spent a lot of time and verbiage on the problems of the last Congress and its lack of cooperation on anything that could move the country forward out of the recession. We groused about the importance in their eyes of supporting their party rather than moving the country forward. However, we have only to look at our own organization to see that we are sometimes guilty of the same behavior. Do we support our unit of ALA and refuse to accept a document that could move ALA forward with compromise? Are we unaware of the issues important to the various other groups? ALA has to represent *all* these groups.

Recently, GODORT has had trouble moving forward with resolutions and working toward successful joint statements with other ALA groups. Now, GODORT itself has often been witness to sometimes caustic in-house differences of opinion on certain resolutions some members wish to put forth. Business meetings have often been witness to “spirited” discussions of this sort. This is normal, and it is valuable to entertain everyone's opinion on topics to arrive at something we hope will pass forward to higher ALA groups and to Council. Recently we have been unable to engage in meaningful dialogue with the Government Information Subcommittee (GIS) of the Committee on Legislation (COL). Often the discussions go beyond “let's see what all interested parties have to say” to a situation where we end up getting nothing passed because of violent differences of opinion between various members of these groups. Let me say this right now: I am not finding fault with anyone, but merely trying to find a way to move forward.

Granted, everyone coming to the table has valid reasons for their opinions, and every different group of ALA has different

issues that are important to them, just like Congressmen all have lobby groups they are supporting with different agendas. The GIS, for example, is comprised of librarians from several different parts of ALA, including GODORT members. They represent public libraries and academic libraries, for example, who have vastly different interests in government information, and have different bills that affect them. The ultimate goal is to formulate a resolution or document that can go to the Committee on Legislation (COL) to represent a majority opinion of all ALA groups on a topic, which COL can then present to ALA Council.

In ALA Council, *all* groups are considered, and resolutions are often postponed to allow other groups to vet them before voting. As a member of the Resolutions Committee, one of my duties is to be on the lookout for resolutions that should go to other units of ALA before being presented to Council (this saves a lot of time on the Council floor). For example, anything with a possible monetary impact on ALA should go to the Budget Committee first, to see if there is any fiscal impact, or to the Committee on Legislation to see if there is anything they wish to edit to keep all materials coming out of ALA consistent (i.e., there may be a similar resolution coming or there may be something in the upcoming resolution that contradicts a previous ALA statement). COL is very good at vetting these problems. Other resolutions may call for a change in ALA Bylaws and must go to that committee before arriving at Council floor. Often the group presenting the resolution had no idea that there would be fiscal impact, or bylaws impact, and so on. The upshot of all this is that, usually, the resolutions that have already been vetted by various groups, and that have been approved by various other divisions or round tables of ALA, are stronger for the exercise and much more likely to pass because there will not be strong opposition. Now, the final result may be weaker in the eyes of the original writers of the resolution, but the earlier version probably wouldn't have passed anyway. Each group presenting a resolution is aware that there probably will have to be some compromises made to move their ideas forward, but they also have the satisfaction of knowing that *some* of their ideas have moved the organization forward, too. The idea here is compromise.

When it comes to resolutions involving interaction with the federal government, there are, as previously stated, several ALA groups that are involved. Besides COL and GIS, the

Washington office is our link to the federal legislative arena, and on their staff are trained lobbyists who know what will work and what will not, when to act, and when to argue. There is also a legislative assembly of ALA, where various groups of ALA interested in government information can interact. All of these groups are possible venues for GODORT to vet potential resolutions to allow all interested parties to comment, and hopefully to arrive at a stronger document in the end—one that will be amenable to COL and will pass on the Council floor. This fall, thanks to ALA creating a new scheduling chart, GODORT has hopefully achieved a schedule which will allow Legislative Committee members (and especially the Legislative chair) to be present at many of these meetings. This gives us a chance to interact with all groups and see what will work and what will not work. Many people in GIS (including GODORT members on the committee) have different opinions. This is good, let's not forget that. However, it is necessary to compromise, because it matters not if what we have down on paper is the absolute truth as-we-know-it. We all know that the truth, as we know it, is only the truth from a certain *point of view* (thank you Obi-Wan). We, as documents librarians, spend a lot of time talking about bias being a good thing; and I often use various government agency views on certain topics to explain how different groups will all see a certain event differently, with different issues at stake. Yet, when push comes to shove, we are in there fighting like lions to get our resolution or our document passed, regardless of other opinions. Why not try to work out a plan that everyone can live with, that doesn't punish any part of ALA, or one type of library group as the "bad guys."

Life, as we know it, will not cease to exist if we cannot reach an agreement, but ALA needs something to put forth that represents the most groups. Regardless of internal bickering, if they cannot present a unified front, it will look foolish to Congress.

This is our fault, and by *our*, I mean the smaller units of ALA who cannot agree. Even if we have to go over every document line by line and say: "Can we all live with this?," in the end we will have something to present to ALA. And, we will be stronger for the exercise. We might learn something about the issues of other groups, something we haven't thought of that could be an issue. Wisdom is achieved by working through a problem and examining all opinions. The more you find out about another group's issues, the easier it is to compose something that you know will work for both of you. There might not be a right or wrong answer to a problem, but only one that most people can live with. I call on GIS, COL, and all units of ALA interested in government issues to follow this spirit of compromise.

Right now, a big issue for GODORT is to move toward a stronger FDLP for the twenty-first century. At the fall Depository Library Council meetings, we saw how the GPO is reaching out to states to develop their own plans within the confines of the present Title 44 restrictions. GPO has already agreed to several changes, even embracing such radical new plans as the Missouri "sub regional" in St. Louis. They are willing to work for change. As I write this *opinion*, I realize that I am writing before Midwinter, but that you will read it after Midwinter. I know that we will be working toward cooperation at these meetings, hopefully trying to reach agreement on a future plan for the FDLP, with and without Title 44 changes. We will have GODORT's point of view, other points of view, and the good of the FDLP, and the desire for ALA to present a unified front to Congress as our focus. I hope that when you read this, you might feel that we (and all units of ALA interested in government issues) have made progress in the area of cooperation, keeping the long-term success of the FDLP, not our own personal views in the forefront. Thanks for listening, and may the *Force* (of compromise) be with you.