



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“The California Library Association [CLA] advocates on library issues. Annually, the association develops a Legislative Agenda, monitors legislation, takes positions on issues and keeps members informed on the status of bills of interest and concern to the association.”

-From “California Library Association: Legislation” at www.cla-net.org/legislation

On Friday February 2, I participated in the CLA’s “Day in the District.” According to their website, Day in the District provides an opportunity to meet with Legislators and their staff in their local offices and inform them about the important role libraries play in the lives of their constituents.” We didn’t actually meet at the local office, but instead got together at Village Grounds in Berkeley.

There were six of us, including State Assemblywoman Loni Hancock; Terri Waller, her district coordinator; Lisa Rabin, from EBSCO publishing; Berkeley High School teacher Ellie Goldstein-Erickson from the California School Library Association; and Joseph Goglio, Director of AFL-CIO Community Services for Contra Costa County .

This was my first Day in the District and I prepared as best I could. I read and re-read the “Talking Points” put out by Kathy Gould, the CLA Day in the District coordinator. This

bulleted list includes facts to draw on, such as: “Studies in other states show that every \$1 invested in library services delivers at least \$4 in economic value to citizens” and “Historically 0.05% (or one-half of one-tenth of 1%!) of California’s general fund moneys are directed to California libraries through the State Library for important services and programs..”

I also studied an email I received from the CLA lobbyists about a brand-new bill, SB 156, introduced by Senator Joe Simitian on January 29, 2007, called “California Reading and Literacy Improvement and Public Library Construction and Renovation Bond Act of 2008.” Sponsored by CLA and co-authored by Lois Wolk, it is similar to a bond act, SB 1161-Alpert, that failed in June 2006, although there have been some financial adjustments made to the new bill, including a change to the minimum and maximum amounts per project.

In addition, I put together a folder of information about the Alameda County Library in general, and the Albany Library in particular. I gathered fliers about our many events, as well as the monthly calendar and an article about the new Sunday hours.

Lastly, I sat down and thought about what I wanted to say about my library and public libraries in general. I realized I had to focus on one aspect and so I decided to write a short piece on the way public libraries address just about every subject that could be part of a political agenda. For instance, we provide relevant and current information on all topics, from health care to aging to education to the environment. Our information comes in many forms, including books, speakers, programs, databases, computers, Homework Centers and online homework help. We are, as well, the place to find out how to choose a doctor or write

to your local congressperson or look for a job. And besides information, we have free meeting rooms for all kinds of groups, so people can engage easily in discussions about topics as wide-ranging as politics or Great Books. When I was finished writing it all down, I printed out the two pages and included them in the packet, too.

Finally, I nervously showed up at the cafe, not sure what to expect. What I discovered was the pleasure of meeting with a politician who is obviously committed to serving her public and who didn't need any convincing on the importance of both public and school libraries. She listened thoughtfully and gave her time and her attention generously. The others were passionate and informed and I came away feeling like in a tiny way I made a difference for libraries. It was a good feeling.