



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“We have gathered today to heighten our legislators’ awareness of the contributions libraries make to our communities, schools, colleges and universities, businesses and agencies. All libraries – public, academic, school and special – are vital to the economic, educational and social well being of the citizens of California, and consequently to the quality of life in our state.”

-From “Library Legislative Day 2007” handout

Last week I attended Library Legislative Day 2007, held in Sacramento. This day gives library employees and those who support libraries a chance to speak up about library bills and concerns. This was my first time and, except for having to get up early enough to be there by 8 a.m., I loved it. This year it was sponsored by three agencies, the California Library Association (CLA), the California School Library Association (CSLA) and the California Association of Library Trustees and Commissioners (CALTAC).

The day started with a brief talk by State Senator Tom Torlakson, a great supporter of libraries. He began his speech by talking about the importance of working together. As he put it, “No one, especially those of us who call ourselves politicians, can do anything alone.” He quickly went over the financial challenges of California right now, and talked about two taxes he thinks librarians should support: a 10 cent gas tax and a user tax on levies. Both of these would help lib-

raries, because there would be more money available if they pass.

The CLA lobbyist, Mike Dillon, also spoke. He started out by saying he tried to reserve the capitol steps for this meeting, but they were taken. I had no idea what he meant by this, until I went outside later on. There I saw group after group meeting on these steps, shouting passionately about issues and being questioned by the media. He was right: the steps were full.

Dillon spent a few minutes explaining how a bill progresses, starting in January with the governor’s budget. He talked about the importance of writing letters to our legislators. Letters have an impact, we were told, and I resolved yet again to take the few minutes required to sit down and write one. It is difficult to believe one letter could matter – but of course, if we all write, it isn’t simply one.

Another speaker was CSLA advocate Jeff Frost. He pointed out that of the 80

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members of the Assembly this year, 32 of them are new. So, in addition to talking about the issues, he encouraged us to tell these members what exactly we do and how the library-related bills will affect our libraries.

My day was centered around two meetings: one with Loni Hancock’s staff person, Rebecca Bauman, and one with Amy Costa, Don Perata’s Education Policy Consultant. About 25 people, including library directors, adult literacy coordinators, adult learners, community members, library trustees, reference staff, school librarians and database vendors, attended each meeting. It was exciting to be in a room with so many people who took the time to advocate for libraries.

In the Perata meeting we each got a chance to speak about a particular issue. These included: the Fund Transaction Based Reimbursement (TBR), which helps pay for California public libraries to share resour-

ces; the Public Library Foundation (PLF), which has never been fully funded and is critical for providing per capita funding for public libraries; Assembly Bill 1233, which would provide funds for the State Librarian to create a program of online homework assistance; Assembly Bill 333, sponsored by Loni Hancock, which would allocate funds for subscriptions to a core collection of online databases for public schools; and, Senate Bill 156, a library construction bond bill. Each person who spoke expanded on what others had said, and I came away feeling that whether or not my words made a difference, I was glad I tried.