

Annual Report
Wyoming Library Association Legislative Committee
October 14, 2004

The Legislative Committee has enjoyed an eventful year. At the 2003 WLA Conference in Sheridan, the Executive Board charged the Legislative Committee with going forward with a library district presentation throughout the state. Plans were made to begin that effort in March of 2004. An ad hoc "Education Committee" was formed. This would be the group that would carry the library district message to all county libraries. Members were Susan Simpson, Dale Collum, Cathy Butler, Bill Nelson and Cynthia Twing.

On January 6, 2004 Cathy Butler, Bill Nelson and Cynthia Twing convened at the Johnson County Library in Buffalo to examine the old library district bill from 1993. They made some slight changes in wording to bring it up to date.

On January 8, 2004 an opinion was received from Wyoming's Attorney General Patrick J. Crank regarding the Committee's question, "Can the mineral industry be exempted from the additional mill levy in a library district?" (This issue was the death knell for the library district bill in 1993.) Attorney General Crank's conclusion was, "The Wyoming legislature has the general power to create tax exemptions. This power however is not without limitation. The legislature's power to create exemptions is limited by the Wyoming and United States Constitution. As discussed, legislation exempting the mineral industry from the additional mill levy in a library district would violate the Wyoming and United States Constitution." This opinion gave the Committee encouragement to proceed with the enabling legislation effort. (The Attorney General's ruling is filed in the permanent records of the Legislative Committee.)

The Legislative Reception on February 12, 2004 in Cheyenne went very smoothly with good attendance from legislators (32) and librarians (142) alike. WLA members provided food and finances in abundance for the event. The budget for the reception was \$700. Donations totaled \$679.00. Payments to the Plains Hotel were \$405.84.

During April, May and June the ad hoc "Education Committee" traveled their respective areas of the state and made the library district Power Point presentation prepared by Bill Nelson with appropriate handouts. It was a learning experience for all involved! The spring meeting of the committee of the whole was held in Buffalo on June 2 & 3, 2004. The afternoon of the the 2nd, discussion centered around the library visits. Most counties supported the idea, but were unsure if a district would be the best thing for their own situation. Concern over what the minerals industry might do was apparent. However,

they did sign the “Resolution of Support”. Two counties were ready to try for a district, one county offered “conditional” support, one county responded with a resounding “no”, and one county refused to take any action. The Legislative Committee did not find the necessary, enthusiastic support needed to proceed with a library district bill. The following motion passed unanimously, “Based on the results of visits to County Library Boards in the state, we have decided not to pursue enabling legislation for library districts at this time.” However, the Committee also resolved to not let the idea of enabling legislation fade away. They are certain that library funding will once again become important and library districts may be the answer to financial crises for libraries. They committed to keeping this issue before the Wyoming library community with continuing education of boards and directors and will seek better ways to keep it in progress. Letters of acknowledgement and thanks were mailed to each library director for allowing the committee to visit and make presentations. The decision of the Legislative Committee was shared with them.

The regular business meeting of the Legislative Committee was held on June 3. Planning for the Legislative Luncheon was a priority. A panel discussion of Wyoming’s economy moderated by Buck McVeigh, Administrator of the Economic Analysis Division of A&I was the preferred topic. The date for the Legislative Luncheon has been set for February 3, 2005 at the Plains Hotel with Elaine Hayes, Laramie County Library chairing the event.

A follow up session with library directors took place at the Directors’ Retreat in Cheyenne on September 17, 2004. Feedback from directors regarding the library district presentations indicated several areas for the Legislative Committee to work on.

- More training for boards and directors
- Keep them informed
- Raise the “education level”
- Communicate the effort involved for boards and directors
- Realize this may take multiple tries
- Realize some county commissioners think this is a good step
- We all need to be lobbyists for our cause
- Realize that some counties are “out of options” and need help
- Realize that some counties will not choose optional funding because of the minerals industry
- We all need to look at the big picture—look beyond our own boundaries
- Realize that it may take an economic imperative to give life to this effort

Respectfully submitted,
Cynthia Twing, Committee Chair

