

Advocacy remains the tool for librarians

To maintain and develop library support in Congress and elsewhere, the primary tool for librarians in all types of libraries is advocacy. With the swearing in of the 106th Congress on January 6 comes a renewed opportunity to connect with your congressional officials and help them understand the "academic library story." Use whatever connection—a friendly alum of your college, your university's official lobbyist, other state-elected officials and library supporters—to get your message across.

Early this fall, ALA participated in a demonstration of information and educational technology at the U.S. House of Representatives to demonstrate some of the ALA-selected Web sites for children. We were accompanied by Carrie Gardner, a school library media specialist from Hershey, Pennsylvania, who helped make our booth one of the most heavily visited by Representatives and congressional staff.

Why? Carrie brought a secret weapon—chocolate. While each staff member walked by to get his or her chocolate, unwrapped it, and put it in his or her mouth, we discussed children's library issues and filtering as well as copyright and other issues of concern to all types of libraries.

Chocolate doesn't work everywhere, but you, too, have a secret weapon to use in lobbying—your expertise in libraries. No one can tell your library's story better than you can. You have experience to illustrate the importance of good library service on a campus more than anyone. You can interest a legislator in why it's so important for students to learn information literacy skills. You don't have to come to Washington, D.C., or your state capital. Invite the legislators to your library. Perhaps the last time he or she was on campus was to cheer on the football team or attend a fundraiser. Getting them into your

library is your chance to show them what great new developments there are in the libraries and information science department. It's your chance to make a connection that can continue and flower into support for libraries and their important role in academic life.

Talk about how federal dollars spent on library and higher education programs have enormous long-lasting benefits. Describe the kind of information and technology skills that you see students need to succeed in college and in future jobs. Share with them the kinds of demands placed on college and university libraries to provide electronic information to increasingly sophisticated high school graduates. Resolve this year to:

- Get to know your legislators and staff; tell the library story!
- Get legislators into your library, create an event, have them discuss any hot topic of interest to your students. How about the census in 2000? Provide press. Help them get some publicity in your campus and local papers about their visit.
 - Attend the ALA advocacy training (Sunday, Jan. 31, 9:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.); get your colleagues together and request a program.
 - Volunteer for legislative committees/networks.
 - Participate in state and national Library Legislative Days; when you do this with a friend or two it's fun and gets easier every time.
 - Respond to calls for action. Write, call, fax, and e-mail legislators and get the latest action alerts by signing onto the ALA Washington Office's ALAWON. (To subscribe to ALAWON, send the message: `subscribe alawo [your_firstname] [your_lastname]` to `listproc@ala.org` or go to `http://www.ala.org/washoff/alawon`.) Follow related ACRL legislative notices and work with your state library associations.
 - Always thank your legislators and followup with regular contact with them and their staff.

Remember, a legislator always pays attention to constituents. You are the chocolate, the secret weapon. Put yourself in action. ■



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