

To: Montana Library Commission

From: Karen Strege, State Librarian

Re: 2001 Legislature report

Date: February 12, 2001

As you already know, this session has been extremely busy for MSL, MLA, and library supporters. Some of the bills opposed by the Commission and the state's libraries have received statewide media attention. Librarians, library board members, and friends of libraries have responded enthusiastically to our calls to contact their legislators. They are responsible for the successes of the last six weeks.

#### 2002-03 Budget Request

The Joint Appropriations Committee on Education heard testimony regarding our budget on January 5. We used a power-point presentation to give an overview of the agency. After the presentation, the committee heard testimony from former state legislator, Toni Hagener from Havre, Madison County Library board member, Diane Carroll, and Townsend High School student, Kelsey Nugent, about the use of the Infotrac product in their communities. The Chairman of the Fish and Game Commission, Stan Meyer, and small business owner, Stuart Blundall, testified on behalf of NRIS's services.

Our proposed budget required six separate motions by the committee, three for each program. The committee approved all motions for Program One. These motions approved a base adjustment for grants, funding for computer replacements, additional software and programming for the Talking Books Library and the library department, funds for a manual for new library directors, an inflation factor for materials, and funding for the periodical database project.

The committee also considered three motions for NRIS with various results. The committee approved an increase in the general fund for NRIS for an additional .6 FTE. However, they did not approve funding to fill NRIS positions at above entry-level rate. We plan to mitigate this vote by attempting to create more vacancy savings and, if necessary, using the contingency fund to commensurate for overages in our personnel budget. The committee also approved small increases in the general fund and the RIT funds, and changes in the number of source agencies and their funding contributions. However, the committee made these changes only for the upcoming budget. This action means that we will have to justify the increases again in 2003.

Some committee members expressed concern over possible duplication of GIS work in state agencies and admitted not to understanding the purpose of NRIS. This attitude was embodied during the budget hearing on the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology, a program at Montana Tech. A member of the committee moved that NRIS be transferred to the Bureau. This motion failed but demonstrated that we must continue to educate legislators about NRIS's services.

The committee has completed its work with Section E of the budget and the Full House Appropriations Committee will consider HB2, the budget bill, in the next few weeks.

## Bills

The House Appropriations Committee considered HB 105, sponsored by Representative Dick Haines, which would establish a GIS trust fund, on January 17. The Committee has taken no further action on the proposal.

HB 124, the big bill, which would restructure the funding of local government, has been assigned to a House select committee. The Montana Association of Counties (MACO) proposed several amendments to the bill; three of which restore current powers to public library boards. The committee approved these amendments. Another MACO amendment approved by the committee will require counties to distribute the new "entitlement" fund from the state on a basis approximate equal to the distribution before the new law is enacted. The entitlement fund is composed of revenue from motor vehicles fee and other miscellaneous fees that libraries now depend on for a portion of their budgets.

HB 130, sponsored by Representative Bob Lawson, upon the request of the Commission, received no opposition in the House. The bill has been assigned to the Senate's Local Government Committee but no hearing date has been set. The bill would clarify library federation law.

SB 139, sponsored by Senator Jack Wells, has been the object of many maneuvers. The Senate Education Committee did not approve the bill by a vote of 6 to 8. The committee submitted an adverse report to the full Senate that accepted the report. However, the Senate, on a voice vote, rereferred the bill to committee. The bill would require public library boards to insure that minors could not access obscene, pornographic, or materials harmful to minors via the Internet.

SB 140, sponsored by Senator Jack Wells, has also been subject to a roller coaster ride. The Senate Education Committee approved the bill by a vote of 6 to 8. The attached schedule of events illustrates the bill's vicissitudes on the Senate floor. The Senate debated this bill twice for almost one and a half hours. By the way, this bill would give parents the right to access their child's library records. I presume that the bill is dead.

SB 149, the library district bill, sponsored by Senator Lorents Grosfield, was approved by the Senate and assigned to the House Local Government Committee. The committee has not yet set a hearing day, but we predict that the hearing will be after the transmittal break, which is February 26-28.