

April 8, 2002

MEMORANDUM

To: Karen Strege, State Librarian; Montana State Library Commission

From: Jim Heckel, director, Great Falls Public Library

Re: Comments on the Recommendation of the ILL Study Committee

CC: Jane Howell

Since I cannot attend the Commission meeting on April 10, I would like to briefly express my concerns with the recommendations of the Interlibrary loan (ILL) study committee to the Networking Task Force and the Montana State Library Commission.

First, I fully support the first three recommendations: that libraries continue to receive subsidies; that net lenders be rewarded; and that additional library participation be encouraged. I also support the principle of recommendation 4: that the Commission should support the purchase of electronic resources to insure that all Montana citizens have equal opportunity.

*I do, however, have deep concerns about the funding recommendation for the fourth recommendation. The committee is recommending that the standard ILL program be cut by **one-third** to support additional electronic resource purchase.*

Let me assure you that I believe that the more electronic resources made available, the better. I do not believe or support the notion that cutting standard ILL to achieve additional electronic resources provides better, fuller services to Montanans. In fact I believe the exact opposite is true. Cutting a valuable, necessary program will certainly decrease service. This is what the recommendation suggests.

The committee assumes that the only source of funding available for additional electronic resources must come from undercutting the ILL program. I suggest that these are two separate issues and demand two funding sources. We should think of enhancing funding for ILL **and** for electronic data bases.

To assume that most information is available electronically is naïve. In fact, vast resources (we sometimes call them books) are not available electronically. A patron doing historical research may certainly, and with good reason, desire to use key books available from other libraries beyond his or her local library. A

patron desiring to read early novels of a favorite author may only be able to do so by acquiring the early novels themselves. All the electronic resources in the world will not provide this patron with what he or she needs.

Traditional ILL is expensive and requires a base level of funding commitment to function. The Great Falls Public Library, for example, is not a major player in the ILL arena. Yet, I have a one-half time staff member devoted to ILL and pay additional fees for ILL subsystems and postage.

As it stands, ILL is a loss leader for us, and cutting ILL reimbursements will not enhance this situation. Yet, the 2002 ILL Survey indicates that demand for ILL has increased nearly 58% in public libraries and 48% in all libraries.

Increased access to electronic data base information is an absolutely essential goal. However, the availability of data bases does not address the main reason many people require traditional ILL: the information he or she desires is simply not available electronically.

Again, I believe the best service possible offers a platter of services: efficient and cost-effective access to the vast realms of books available only on the shelves of vast numbers of libraries; and electronic resources. Robbing Peter to pay Paul will not accomplish both of these lofty goals.

At the very least, I would hope that the Commission would encourage widespread discussion and comment of this proposal before acting on the recommendations.