

May 27, 2003

To: Montana State Library Commission  
From: Karen Strege, State Librarian  
Re: 2003 Legislative Report

Comments:

The divisive tone of this past legislative session has been widely reported. Legislators struggled to make difficult choices among important services as they balanced the state's budget. Our budget hearing was scheduled for the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of committee meetings. The early hearing was a disadvantage as legislators were just beginning to understand the implications of the rollback to the 2000 base. Our legislative and executive budget analysts, to their credit, worked hard to give the committee the accurate portrayal of our proposed budget and its impacts.

The power point presentation was well received although the committee members did not have many questions for us regarding programs and few about funding. The committee seemed to be interested in the NRIS program and introduced a committee bill to augment funding through the Treasure State Endowment Program. The committee did backfill the general fund reduction with coal severance tax revenues leaving MSL about 10% all funds reduced for the 04-05 period. The budget reductions and the grant program budgets follow.

The agency and the Montana Library Association attempt to communicate legislative decisions and their possible impacts to the library community without being overly reactive or exaggerating. The library community contacted legislators when requested to ask for positive support.

An action not included in the list of bills below was a proposed amendment to HB2 offered by Senator Tom Zook, Miles City that would have eliminated the NRIS program. Apparently, Senator Zook disagreed with the necessity of Heritage Program studies, such as studying the use of highway bridges by bat colonies, which was funded by the Department of Transportation. Fortunately, Senator Zook changed his amendment to require that NRIS report to the Legislative Finance Committee during the interim. We look forward to doing so. This action took place in the Senate Finance and Claims Committee during the first week of April.

The reversion to the 2000 base, which meant a 27% reduction in all funds to the agency, the various bills that would have halved or eliminated the coal severance tax for the agency, along with the declining revenue projections combined to make a very stressful session for all involved. The dynamics of the session required careful monitoring and much impromptu strategizing.

Perhaps because of concern with the budget, only one bill was introduced that affected library law. For the second session, a legislator attempted to modify the library records confidential act to allow parents to view their children's' library records. Fortunately, we our hearing was in front of the State Administration Committee, whose members did not understand the need for such legislation and soundly tabled the bill.

**Reductions in grants and programs for libraries**

	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>
Federation support	-79,217	-79,217
Interlibrary loan reimbursements	-127,000	-127,000
Per capita/per square mile	-12,675	-7,282

### Potential budget for grants and programs for libraries

Federation support	100,000	100,000
Interlibrary loan reimbursements	172,635	172,635
Per capita/per square mile	102,831	108,206
Periodical database project	219,000	219,000

### Reductions in MSL operations

Two FTE	-53,162	-53,070
Materials	-44,152	-44,152
Administration	-10,081	-10,081
NRIS/Heritage	-37,500	-37,500

### Bills of interest

HB 177, which would have reduced our share of the CST by half, was tabled in Appropriations on March 12.

HB 491, which would have made TSEP funding available to fund natural resource information projects at the state library, was tabled in Appropriations on February 17.

HB 593, which would have revised coal severance tax allocations by earmarking part of the shared accounts to "Coal" counties, was tabled in Appropriations on March 26.

HB 694, which would have changed Library Records Confidentially Law, missed the transmittal deadline.

Senator Walter McNutt, the sponsor of SB 142 withdrew the bill, which would have changed the public record access law.

A bill was drafted to allocate \$150,000 from the gas tax that currently funds the underground storage tax cleanup fund at the Department of Environment Quality to MSL. The draft was not introduced.