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National Library and Information Services Act (1979-1980): Speech 02

Javits

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Mr. Javits:

Mr. President, today I am introducing, joined by Senators Kennedy, Randolph, Pell, and Williams, the National Library and Information Services Act, a comprehensive bill to provide for coordination of interlibrary resource sharing and to expand the Federal government's support of public library services for all segments of the population. Our bill, which is based on legislation, S. 1124, which I introduced on May 14 of last year, with Senators Kennedy and Randolph, for the purposes of study by the delegates to the White House Conference on Library and Information Services, is the culmination of many months and years of work in preparation for the Conference, which was held in November, 1979. It incorporates the principal legislative recommendations approved by the Conference delegates, and is intended to replace the existing mechanism of Federal support for public libraries, the Library Services and Construction Act, which expires in 1982.

The purpose of our initial legislation, S. 1124, was to provide a focus for debate of the key issues facing libraries in connection with the White House Conference, including relationships among the State, local, and the Federal governments in providing funding, interlibrary cooperation, planning, construction, and the methods of meeting special user needs. S. 1124 served that purpose as a fulcrum for consideration of these and other critical issues at the Conference, and the current bill represents a broad consensus of all the major library and information organizations which have so far addressed the issue of comprehensive legislation. With the recommendations

of the White House Conference in hand, and the expiration of the Library Services and Construction Act shortly upon us, the time is now ripe for full Congressional hearings and final amendment prior to enactment.

The Need for this Legislation

The Nation's library system has not kept pace with the information needs of present-day America. We require a bold new initiative on both national and state levels to make better use of existing resources and to develop new techniques for information access and sharing.

Many local public libraries across the country are in deep trouble. Sharp inflationary cost increases, combined with budget cuts, have forced staff layoffs, reduced hours, and lower purchasing of library materials, books and periodicals in many communities. Local taxpayer revolts against regressive property and sales taxes (like California's Proposition 13) have increased the pressures to close branches and retrench generally.

Meanwhile the demand for library services has been surging. Older citizens are jamming reading rooms of public libraries as never before. People out of work have learned that libraries can help them with job information and career changes. Adult self-learners have joined college and high school students in using public libraries as study and research centers. The poor, the disabled, the illiterate, the non-English speaking, the institutionalized--all are hungering for the information and library services that are as rightfully theirs as they are

of the affluent and middle income members of society.

Over 80% of the cost of the nation's public libraries is borne by local government. The State and Federal governments together pay less than 20%. Yet public libraries provide services which plainly should be available to all, regardless of race, creed, or economic status. Such services should be funded fairly with the goal of guaranteeing adequate library services for the residents of every city, town, village, hamlet and farm of every State in the land.

General Provisions of the Bill

The bill brings together in one comprehensive piece of legislation the principal suggestions made by various library groups over the course of several years. Most of the provisions are familiar to those who are active in the field. The major provisions of the bill will accomplish the following: (A) Expand the responsibilities of the U.S. Department of Education in providing support for coordinated library and information services nationally and internationally while preserving local control over state and local library services; (B) Provide funding for local, regional, national and international information networks linking all publicly-funded libraries and all private libraries who wish to participate; (C) Authorize Federal matching funds to support public library services; (D) Provide matching funds to spur public library construction and renovation; (E) Specifically authorize Federal grants to meet the special needs of library users, such as rural residents, the functionally illiterate, handicapped, disadvantaged; (F) Support state planning and public awareness programs and the training of local personnel in library skills.

Basic Provisions

The bill redefines the responsibilities of the Department of Education's Office of Library and Learning Technologies to coordinate research into innovative library techniques and to plan and coordinate sharing of information and resources. The functions of the proposed agency incorporate many of the recommendations of the White House Conference as well as those of the American Library Association. The bill makes it clear that what is intended is a service agency with no direction or control over local library administration, selection of personnel, or the purchase of library books and materials. It is contemplated that the office will come under the jurisdiction of an Assistant Secretary for Library and Information Services when and if that post is established.

Title I. Interlibrary cooperation. Federal funds appropriated under this title would be used for planning, development, and maintenance of cooperative library networks on local, state, regional and national levels; pooling the resources of different kinds of libraries (including school, academic, public and special) for joint access and exchange of materials; and providing financial aid for research libraries whose collections are used by the general public.

Title II. Operating funds for public libraries. The Federal share of matching funds would be based on the Hill-Burton formula, taking into account the economic resources of the various states. A maximum of 5% of the funds authorized by this title could be used to meet state administrative costs, and the balance would be distributed to local public libraries

on the basis of population, with appropriate adjustments provided for by state regulation. The funds would be used for general library operating expenses, including acquisitions, staff, heat, light and similar costs. This would be continuing year-to-year support, rather than short-term demonstration grants as under present limited LSCA funding.

Title III. Public library construction. There have been no Federal construction funds for libraries for the past several years, and the need for renewal of this assistance, particularly for unserved and under-served communities, is very real. All construction grants would be joint Federal-State matching funds, again based on the Hill-Burton formula, and would permit acquisition of existing structures and conversion for library purposes.

Title IV. Public library programs to meet special user needs. People who live in rural, sparsely populated and impacted areas would be eligible for special library funds under this title, which is also intended to fund special services to meet problems not uniform in the general population-- problems like illiteracy, high unemployment, inability to speak English, physical handicaps, people who are institutionalized, the economically and educationally disadvantaged, and other groups with special needs. These special library service grants would be financed entirely out of Federal funds allocated under state plans.

Title V. Planning and development. Grants under this

title are to be used for planning and strengthening of state library systems, public awareness programs, and training of library personnel in the local communities, including trustees.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that an index to the National Library Services and Information Services Act, and a cross-reference from the relevant resolutions adopted by the White House Conference to the sections of the Act be included in the Record. I also ask unanimous consent that the Senate submit portfolio, containing the signatures of delegates and alternates to the Conference petitioning the Congress and the President to enact a National Library Act, to be made part of the National Archives, and that the statement of purpose for this petitioning be made part of the Record.