

1987

White House Conference on Library and Information Services: Early Stages (1979-1985): Speech 02

Bill Bryant

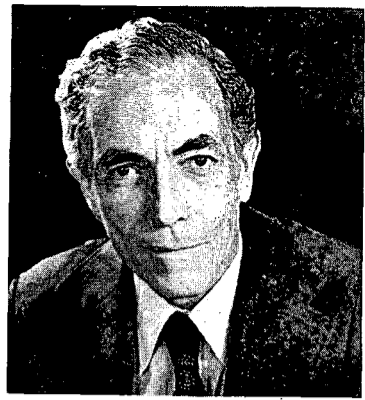
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PELL INTRODUCES LIBRARY MEASURE FOR 1989 WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE

Senator Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.) today introduced a measure asking the President to call a White House Conference on Library and Information Services to be held by 1989.

Pell said that "to help focus attention on a wide range of issues connected with the initiation of this Conference, I intend to convene a hearing of the Subcommittee on Education, Arts and Humanities on an early date in this 100th session of the Congress.

"It is time now for library users, civic leaders and lawmakers at all levels to join earnestly in working with librarians and suppliers of information services to plan a second White House Conference. This Conference will be a significant reaffirmation of our commitment to our libraries."

Pell, who also introduced the resolution that spurred the first White House Conference on Library and Information Services in 1979, noted that one of the important recommendations of this first Conference "was that a similar Conference at the federal level be held every ten years."

That first Conference, he said, "focused national attention on the critical issues then affecting library and information services. The long range benefits that resulted from the Conference were many, but foremost among them were increased state appropriations for libraries and the formation of many statewide Friends of Libraries organizations."

"It is now time," Pell said, "to formally establish this second Conference and to begin the serious task of setting an agenda that will properly address the important issues facing libraries today. A similar proposal, introduced in the 99th Congress, had gathered the bipartisan support of 50 Senators before time ran out, delaying further action until this year."

Pell noted that a White House Conference Preliminary design Group "has already proposed that three overarching themes be the focus for the 1989 Conference: library and information services for productivity, for literacy and for democracy."

Libraries, he said, "provide research and information services that are vital to the economic well being of our nation...The White House Conference will consider how libraries can further contribute to economic vitality and growth."

Literacy, he said, "should rightly be addressed as a crisis of major national importance. Fully one-fifth of the American adult population, of 27 million persons, cannot read beyond the fifth grade level, while another 46 million are only marginally competent in reading and writing skills."

"By coincidence," he added, "the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution will occur about the same time as the White House Conference on Libraries and Informations Services. This event should help focus additional attention on the third theme for the Conference: the importance of information in a democratic society."