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Rep. William Ford (D-MI), House Postsecondary Education Subcommittee Chairman, introduced April 18 H.J.Res.244, calling for a 2nd White House Conference on Library and Information Services no later than 1989. His introductory statement of June 19 is reprinted here. The companion bill, S.J.Res.112, was introduced April 16 by Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-RI). His introductory speech is reprinted on the reverse of this sheet.

AMERICA'S LIBRARIES IN CRISIS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Michigan [Mr. Forb] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. FORD of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, on April 19, 1985, I introduced legislation calling for a White House Conference on Library and Information Services (H.J. Res. 244). Because events of the last few months have demonstrated that the need for such a conference is urgent, I would like to take this opportunity to state the case for this legislation. In brief, library service, as we have come to know it in America, is gravely endangered. The ominous cloud above the library is not a spectacular one causing massive public outcry; instead, it is barely visible, gathering momentum almost undetected by the public at large. If not soon recognized, understood, and remedied, the problems besetting the Nation's libraries will cause irreparable harm before many people realize what has happened.

This administration's repeated efforts to eliminate Federal funding for library programs have been widely reported in the media and understood by the general public. We have all heard from our constituents that Federal support for library programs is in the public interest, and we have continued to authorize and appropriate funds for elementary and secondary school libraries, academic, and public libraries. (Although Federal funds for school libraries have been consolidated in a block grant, I, for one, intend to monitor the effects of the block grant approach on school library service.)

The threat of curtailed Federal funding for school, academic and public library programs is not the only danger facing libraries; indeed, if it were, a White House Conference would not be so urgent. The White House Conference is needed to enable the American public to examine the impact of libraries of many Government policies involving some which are seemingly tangential to libraries but which in fact may jeopardize American libraries to the core.

For example, as chairman of the House Post Office and Civil Service Committee, I have had an opportunity to learn firsthand how postal policies can affect library service. The mailing of newspapers, magazines, books, and classroom publications has been subsidized for many years through the setting of lower-than-market rates for the primary purpose of the subsidy has been to promote the dissemination of information throughout the Nation by means of the postal system—a tradition that dates back to the 18th century. Since 1904, postal policy has allowed the mailing of library materials to the blind and physically handicapped at no cost, again using the postal system to promote the dissemination of information to those without access. Historically, the Federal Government, from general tax revenues, has helped certain people pay their postal bills, not as a special favor to them, but in furtherance of the national good. Low rates for small newspapers facilitate the flow of necessary information to all parts of the country, especially rural areas. Subsidized rates for schools, libraries, and suppliers of classroom materials help advance the education of our young people. And low rates for mailings by charitable organizations may make some small contribution toward helping the truly needy.

This year, however, the President proposed that no money be appropriated to continue such traditionally preferred postal rates. While libraries are not the chief beneficiary of postal subsidies, library service to the public is severely impacted by the proposed termination, because library postage bills would increase dramatically. Neither the libraries themselves, usually on fixed annual or 2-year budgets, nor their users, especially the elderly, the handicapped, and those in rural or isolated locations who depend on library books-by-mail services, can absorb the massive postal increases. It is a truism that every extra dollar libraries must spend on postage is a dollar less for the purchase of library resources and provision of services. Equally obvious is the fact that if libraries are forced to pass on increased costs to their users, libraries will begin to serve only those who can afford to pay for the service. Thus the relationship between postal policy and library service is of crucial importance. In fact, the setting of postal policy can alter drastically the role of the library in our society. The library of today—a publicly supported institution providing a public service to all—could become an institution charging fees for its services, thus limiting its clientele to the affluent.

Another example of Federal policy promulgation with serious impact on libraries is embodied in the recent Office of Management and Budget circular purporting to provide a general policy framework for management of Federal information resources. (Management of Federal Information Resources, Draft OMB Circular, 50 FR 10734 (March 15, 1985).) The guidelines set forth in this circular, if implemented, would sharply reduce the Government's collection of information and its dissemination to the public, while escalating the so-called privatization of Government information. I have reviewed a statement on this subject by Francis J. Buckley, Jr., of the Detroit Public Library, who cites several instances of the relationship between such privatization and curtailed public access to Government information.

For example, the Microfiche Systems Protection Board (MSPB) announced in the March 4, 1985, Federal Register that it will no longer publish the full text of its decisions in bound volumes, referring users to four private sector sources instead. The volumes in the past have been provided at no charge to 472 depository libraries across the country, including 37 Federal libraries. In addition, copies were available for purchase through the Government Printing Office at a cost of approximately $55 per year. The private publishers cited offer the decisions in various formats (bound volumes, loose-leaf services, and microfiche), not all of which include complete texts, at prices ranging from $250 to $498 per year. Few depository libraries or citizens will be able to subscribe to the MSPB decisions at these prices. Thus, discontinuation of Government publication represents a blow to the Depository Library Program, the Government Printing Office sales program, and inhibits public access to the information involved.