White House Conference on Library and Information Services: Final Passage (1988): Correspondence 04

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June 15, 1987

Honorable Robert T. Stafford  
United States Senate  
Room SH-133  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Bob:

As you may know, the House recently passed H.J. Res. 90, authorizing and requesting the President to call and conduct a White House Conference on Library and Information Services, not earlier than 1989 and not later than 1991.

H.J. Res. 90, as introduced last January 21st, contained two amendments, which were added in accordance with your expressed wishes, and those of the State of Vermont. One was to make the State pre-conference provision an "option" rather than mandatory, and the second was to allow the participation of delegates from states in the National Conference regardless of whether they held state preliminary conferences.

During Committee consideration of H.J. Res. 90, Mr. Jeffords, our Committee's ranking minority member, added report language that recognizes that States may use LSCA funds in preparing for a preliminary conference, but urges States to seek out non-Federal funding sources to the extent possible, a position I strongly concur in. Further, I myself added report language to assure that those States that do not elect to hold a preliminary conference may still send delegates to the White House Conference if they so choose. The Advisory Committee has been instructed to develop guidelines for this purpose. In other words, having taken the greatest possible care to address Vermont's concerns (expressed during the 99th Congress when similar legislation was pending), I am at a loss with regard to what I understand is a request from your State Library liaison person to have you offer an amendment prohibiting the use of LSCA funds for purposes of conducting preliminary Governor's Conferences on Libraries and Information Services.
Honorable Robert T. Stafford  
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Having worked with you for many years on library issues, and knowing that you consider our support for libraries to be an integral part of providing overall educational opportunities for young and old alike, I respectfully request your consideration of the following:

All States and territories receiving Library Services and Construction (LSCA) funds are required to develop five-year State plans, subject to the approval of the Secretary of Education, which outline the State's goals and objectives in using those funds. Because the possibility of a Second White House Conference on Libraries has been on most State agendas for some time, such five-year plans already in effect in the States include their intent to hold preliminary state conferences, and to use a modest portion of LSCA funds for that purpose, once Federal authorizing legislation is passed.

The Library Services and Construction Act encourages, as a Federal policy, flexibility for states in determining the use of their LSCA funds. State's rights doctrine as enacted under LSCA is contrary to any effort by the Federal government to dictate, as a Federal policy (and for the first time) how States are to use those funds. If such an amendment were adopted, it would mean that the results of any LSCA-funded research documents or data base could not be used in preparation for either a State preliminary conference, or for the National Conference. This could very well lead to the claim that the Federal government condones the suppression of information, or worse, a limitation on public access to such information.

I have had correspondence from a majority of the States and territories, expressing their interest in a White House Conference on Library and Information Services. H.J. Res. 90 has been cosponsored by 178 of my colleagues in the House, and S.J. 26 has 56 of your Senate colleagues as cosponsors. I believe you will understand our concern over a Vermont objection to an activity in which it is not required to take part or to be associated with. As indicated by the amendments to H.J. Res. 90 making such participation wholly voluntary, it is my sincere belief that States wishing to participate should be allowed to do so without further barriers being placed in their way.

With warm personal regards, I am

Sincerely,

WILLIAM D. FORD
Member of Congress

WDF/bkw