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Information Services: Early Stages (1979-1985)

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## White House Conference on Library and Information Services: Early Stages (1979-1985): Correspondence 04

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Sandy,

For fresh rhetoric, I don't think you can do any better than the themes in the Report "Toward the 1989 White House Conference on Library and Information Services" done for the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science in December 1985 by the NCLIS' White House Conference Preliminary Design Group. Here are the themes with some thoughts to use as you wish:

1. LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES FOR PRODUCTIVITY

A Nation at Risk said: "Knowledge, learning, information, and skilled intelligence are the new raw materials of international commerce..."

The NCLIS WHCLIS Report (p. 7) says:

Libraries are information agencies in an information society.

As more business become international, and we compete further in international markets, business needs an expanded understanding of other cultures, languages, and business practices.

Small businesses, an increasingly significant part of our economy, need library services because they cannot afford extensive in-house information resources or massive retraining programs.

As technological changes are having an enormous impact on our economy and as our society rapidly becomes more information-based and information-driven, the ability to locate, acquire, organize and use information is essential to success.

The Jan. 7, 1987 Chronicle of Higher Education notes a new extension service by universities to provide technological and management assistance to businesses and industries. These units patterned on agricultural extension services, collect and disseminate results of new research, and go to businesses and industries to help solve problems. The Pennsylvania Technical Assistance Program at Pa. State Univ. uses librarians and library skills to answer questions ranging from "How do you dispose of this hazardous waste?" to "How do you bond glass to aluminum?" Librarians at this center saved money and improved the efficiency of the state's tire manufacturers by telling them about a new method for testing tires which had been developed by the U.S. Navy.

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According to Rep. Norman Mineta at a March 1986 Science, Research and Technology Subcom. hearing, the Japanese "Prime Minister's structure has a unit that has 5,700 translators looking at nothing but U.S. technical publications." In contrast only 20 percent of Japan's sci/tech literature is indexed in Western sources, and less than 25 percent is available in Western languages. Congress recently authorized \$1 million under the Japanese Technical Literature Act to increase the availability of such translations, but it is only a drop in the bucket. The agency that would implement the Act, the Commerce Dept.'s National Technical Information Service, has been proposed by OMB for contracting out to the private sector.

## 2. LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES FOR LITERACY

A study, "Literacy: Profiles of America's Young Adults," released in September 1986 by the National Assessment of Educational Progress of the literacy skills of America's young adults (ages 21-25) concluded that while there is not a major illiteracy problem, there is a literacy problem. NAEP explained this seeming contradiction this way: by yesterday's standards, 95 percent can read and understand the printed word, but in terms of tomorrow's needs, only a very small percentage can understand complex material. Parents' education and access to literacy materials were found to be positively related to literacy achievement.

The American Library Association, in response to A Nation at Risk, identified four realities for effective educational reform within a learning society. The four realities are:

- (1) Learning begins before schooling.
- (2) Good Schools require good school libraries.
- (3) People in a learning society need libraries throughout their lives.
- (4) Public support of libraries is an investment in people and communities.

In Indiana, a study showed that reading skills, verbal expression, and library skills were significantly greater in an elementary school after library services were increased. Disadvantaged children in Boston increased their skills in verbal expression of ideas and their language ability after 12 weekly one-hour library programs with books and storytelling.

However, 7 percent of schools still have no libraries.

Also see the excellent list of bulleted literacy statistics on p. 9 of the NCLIS WHCLIS Report.

## 3. LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES FOR DEMOCRACY

The NCLIS WHCLIS Report says:

Information can help citizens and public officials anticipate, keep abreast of, and understand issues confronting our society -- issues that may challenge our basic ways of living and thinking. As changes take place in the federal government, more is expected of state and local governments.

Government decision making is not the sole responsibility of elected or paid officials -- a democratic society depends upon the informed participation of its people.

The Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution, which coincides with the WHCLIS, suggests the importance and timeliness of this theme.

Our U.S. heritage is at risk. Acids used in paper since about 1850 are destroying major portions of the collections of research libraries. About 1/4 to 1/2 of all paper in existing library book collections is in such poor condition that further use by circulation or photocopying may result in loss

of text. Without treatment, all but about 10 percent of the remainder of book collections are expected to reach the same brittle state.

The ink has faded so badly on the U.S. Constitution that scholars are not sure of the proper punctuation in all cases, even by comparing existing copies.

Libraries are the original self-help institutions which have enabled generations of immigrants, refugees, and disadvantaged to become literate and go on to make major contributions to our democratic society.

The Administration has, to a significant extent, restricted and privatized government information. Through a combination of specific policy decisions, interpretation and implementation of the 1980 Paperwork Reduction Act, implementation of the Grace Commission recommendations, and agency budget cuts, the Administration has limited citizen access to public documents and statistics.

Finally, through six years of attempts to eliminate all federal library programs, the Administration has sowed confusion about the proper federal role in regard to libraries. Eliminating LSCA as the Administration has again proposed would compound the damage to public libraries from the termination of general revenue sharing. In FY '83, the most recent year for which such data is available, libraries received 1.65 percent of revenue sharing funds or \$76 million. In West Virginia, 22 percent of local support of public libraries came from revenue sharing; in Pennsylvania it was 14 percent. Public libraries will also be affected indirectly as localities seek to cut some services for funds to replace revenue sharing used for other services, such as police and fire protection.

In an era of rapidly changing information and communications technology, and in an era of some shifting of roles among levels of government, it is appropriate that we reexamine and redefine the future federal role in support of libraries, one of our premier democratic institutions.

Carol  
Henderson