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Statement by Senator Pell on H.R. 2878

Mr. President, as one of the original sponsors of the Senate legislation to amend and extend the Library Services and Construction Act, I am very pleased to see a final proposal come before us today that has the agreement of House and Senate conferees. H.R. 2878 has my strongest support and I am pleased to speak on behalf of its passage today.

Before doing so, however, I would like to recognize the fine substantive work done by Senator Stafford, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Education, Arts and Humanities, in developing this bill and in forging a consensus on it. I want to particularly thank Susan Franson and Ellin Congleton of his staff for their day-to-day role in developing what I believe to be a solid reauthorized Library Services and Construction Act.

This Act, which I have been proud to support throughout four Senate terms, is the single most important source of federal assistance for our nation's libraries. It provides this support to the states by a system of formula grants which have been targeted toward particularly needy areas. These areas have traditionally included under-served groups such as the handicapped, the disadvantaged and those people who speak English as a second language.

As more and more of these targeted populations have been reached with library services, the LSCA has been broadened to include support for urban libraries, construction of library buildings, interlibrary cooperation and resource sharing. The federal share represents only a modest portion of the total expenditure on all of these essential library programs but it becomes evermore important that we continue the federal role because local jurisdictions alone
cannot finance programs that will adequately meet the demands placed on our libraries.

Major urban libraries can now benefit in very useful and productive ways from LSCA funds. Inflation has hit these urban institutions particularly hard and has caused open hours to be cut back as well as curtailed the purchase of new books and materials. Municipalities have also been forced to reduce library services as residents have moved to the suburbs taking their tax dollars with them.

I am pleased that this measure authorizes funds for the construction and renovation of library buildings. The funds appropriated in 1983 as part of the Emergency Jobs Bill were a helpful beginning in this regard but only a fraction of the potential projects could be carried out. It would take close to $400 million to adequately address the problems of overcrowding and deteriorating facilities, but the monies authorized here will certainly be an important step in the right direction.

H.R. 2878 is legislation that renews our government's commitment to a healthy, vital and accessible public library system in the United States. Libraries have correctly been described as our most important education resource - second only to the classroom. For this reason alone this bill deserves our support. I urge my colleagues to join with Senator Stafford and myself in approving the Library Services and Construction Act Amendments of 1984.