

From the President

Ross Holt, President

I would like to call your attention to an editorial by John Berry III entitled, "Serve and Starve? Not Now," in the November 1, 2002, issue of *Library Journal*. It made me think of a line from *King Lear*, "To plainness honor's bound when majesty falls to folly."

In a pleasingly direct manner, Berry takes *American Libraries* editor Leonard Kniffel to task for an editorial that appeared in the October 2 issue of that magazine. Kniffel suggested that now, in a bad economy, is not the appropriate time for librarians to address the issue of low salaries, and instead to pursue some nebulous goal of making "our constituents aware of what we do and how we serve their intellectual best-interests" until "prosperity hits."

Berry, however, points out that "the well-paid editor of the official organ of the American Library Association" is undermining the main goal of ALA President Mitch Freedman, an initiative to address low salaries for librarians and other library workers. He also hits other leaders (or perhaps, thinkers) in the profession who "have never seen a rank-and-file library workers' salary increase that they liked" and chides them for a "serve and starve mentality" that "has kept library salaries depressed for our entire history."

While I really don't have a dog in the two editors' fight, Berry's article was particularly provocative for me. For one thing, it made me remember my sojourn to the Snowbird Leadership Institute, something I generally try not to do. Specifically, it made me recall the moment when I decided I'd rather be anywhere else, which I think occurred on about the second day of the week-long event (although it actually may have happened earlier, perhaps when I heard someone talk about "journaling," which, apparently, means keeping a journal).

It was one of those activities in which you vote with red dot stickers. The counselors had asked us campers to identify Serious Issues facing libraries, so the butcher paper taped to the wall was covered with things like intellectual freedom, intellectual property, funding, information haves vs. have-nots, and a host of other equally Serious Issues.

Once we had appropriately brainstormed, the counselors gave us something like five red dots apiece and asked us to pick that number of Issues that were the very most Serious of all the Serious Issues. The campers, mostly front-line librarians, chose funding by a wide margin.

That didn't suit a couple of the counselors, who urged us to choose a less prosaic issue. "Library funding has actually increased" over such and such a period, said one, as another chimed in, "Yeah, you can't solve a problem by throwing money at it."

So, thought I, I had flown three quarters of the way across the country on a rickety, over-age airliner with overhead compartments that slanted upward so that when you opened them at the end of the flight things fell on your head, and landed in ... the Reagan era? Then I thought, well, throw enough money at me and I'll take some of those other issues off the board for you.

There was such a sense of fatalism among some of the Snowbird elite, in fact, that anytime we discussed funding of libraries the conversation was channeled toward the idea of "partnering" with corporate America because the day of increased public funding was past. So much for libraries as a public good.

Fortunately, since the year of my visit to 95,000 feet, the Randolph County Board of Commissioners, the LSCA, the LSTA and the Rural Internet Access Authority have thrown just enough money at the Randolph County Public Library that we are fully automated and provide free public Internet access to anyone who walks through the door. Now the thousands of Latino immigrant workers we're welcoming to our community, not to mention longer-term residents in our large and relatively rural county, are not information "have-nots," and are no more than 15 miles or a 20-minute drive from a high-bandwidth Internet connection—not to mention other services like storytimes, newspapers, and just plain books.

Similarly, *no one* thought that the Aid to Public Libraries fund could avoid a legislative budget cut of at least eight percent in the recent session of the General Assembly. Nonetheless, the North Carolina Library Association and the North Carolina Public Library Directors Association undertook an unprecedented lobbying effort to forestall the cut—and succeeded. The state aid fund was one of the few areas of the budget outside of public schools that was not cut.

Maybe those who say "now is not the time" just aren't trying hard enough.

Throw Me the Money!
