

Libraries *ARE* an Essential Service

Headlines throughout the media have been featuring the grave financial situation the state and its taxpayers are currently facing. For a variety of reasons, the state incurred a \$1.3 billion deficit in the 2002 – 2003 fiscal year (right now) and a \$1.1 billion dollar deficit in the next fiscal year. Because our constitution requires the state to have a balanced budget, there are two options: cut spending or raise revenues.

To solve the crisis Governor McCallum proposed Assembly Bill I, which would eliminate all shared revenues to local municipalities. [For a full discussion of this issue go to http://www.oshkoshpubliclibrary.org/pages/state_budget/budgetFAQ.html and www.owls.lib.wi.us/info/desk/rick/htm] The Bill also included a 5% cut to library system aids. All of this prompts the question, are libraries an essential service?

Whether the Governor's plan goes through unchanged or not, municipalities will be faced with evaluating every service they offer including traditional services such as libraries, public safety, sanitation, and others. Nobody is suggesting raising taxes, so something has to go. Some lawmakers, and even some misguided librarians, have stated that libraries will have to be cut to preserve "essential" services.

Since when did libraries become superfluous to our communities? Let's look at the facts. Visit any public library after school and you will find crowds of students working on homework assignments. The public schools can't take up the slack. And what about private and faith based schools where libraries are nearly non-existent? What about the growing number of families home schooling their children? Libraries are a vital part of our educational system.

It's income tax time. Where in your community are tax forms being distributed other than at the library? Is your home without Internet access? Where can you go, other than the library, to find information over the net or use Email?

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Special Libraries at the Crossroads Issue



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If there were no libraries, how would you gain access to the variety of subscription databases available from your library's web site? Nineteen libraries participating in the Winnefox shared automation system circulated nearly 3 million items in 2001. All of these items were loaned for free. How much would the residents of those 19 communities have to pay to purchase those items if there were no libraries?

Libraries ARE an essential service. We cannot concede this fact or let others frame the argument when lawmakers propose eliminating non-essential services in order to balance the budget. Would we really want to live in a state that limited the definition of essential municipal services to police and fire protection? Are bare bones tax rates worth that sort of sacrifice in our quality of life? If cuts need to be made, let them be distributed evenly so that some essential services are not threatened with extinction.



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Library Systems Take Cuts in 2003

The next fiscal year will be tough on public libraries as they face a double dose of funding cuts as both cities and counties scramble to compensate for losses in state shared revenue. And just when they are needed most, library systems will experience a 5% cut in state aids. The Governor has included this in his Budget Reform Act to deal with the state's looming deficit. No matter what may happen to the Governor's controversial proposal to slash shared revenues to municipalities, sources at the Capital have stated that the cut in library system aids is not likely to change.

Though public figures of every stripe call for cutting the fat, where is the fat in library systems? Our systems have been dealing with lean budgets for years. In the last 11 years, library system aids increased 30% or an average of 2.75% per year. There were actually no increases at all in three of those years. Over the same period, state spending as a whole increased 73% or an average of nearly 7% per year. If there is any fat at all, it appears to be in other areas of the state budget.

At the same time, library systems have been called potential poster children for what the Kettl Commission was calling for when it recommended establishing cooperative services that crossed political boundaries. Library systems save tax dollars by operating shared automation systems, providing van delivery of material shared between libraries, central cataloging and book processing, providing electronic resources to connect to library websites, and much, much, more. Without library systems, library services would take a thirty-year step back in time and in service delivery.

So what can you do as a trustee? First, acknowledge the fact that the next years are going to be hard on every service and some cuts are inevitable. Second, communicate directly to local and state lawmakers both as trustees and as library users. Let them know that you consider libraries and library systems to be an essential service and why. Third, let your local patrons know that it is time for them to speak out as well.

One message we hear from legislators over and over again, is that people never contact them about libraries, one way or another. If libraries are to survive and remain a vital part of our communities, this has to change. Lastly, we have to work with legislators to look for new funding solutions for the future. If libraries are part of the problem, we must work with lawmakers to find creative solutions.

Tax Exempt?

The Governor and many state legislators often cite the Kettl Commission as recommending consolidation of services across municipal boundaries as a way of bringing greater efficiency to the delivery of services. One piece of Commission advice that is rarely mentioned is the recommendation to abolish most sales tax exemptions. Some claim this would be imposing a new tax. Others maintain this would only close loopholes making a tax more equitable. Sales in libraries such as used books and photocopy services are **not** tax exempt.



Steve Procas, President of the Wisconsin Library Association (WLA) and Director of Neenah Public Library addresses attendees at Library Legislative Day in Madison.

Examples of Various Sales Tax Exemptions Which Total More Than Current \$1.3 Billion Deficit

Coin-Operated Laundry and Dry Cleaning Services	\$2,350,000.00
Machine and Equipment Used in Manufacturing	\$240,000,000.00
Waste Treatment Facilities	\$30,100,000.00
Long -Term Rental Payments for Real Estate Used for Business Purposes	\$323,300,000.00
Trucks, Tractors, Buses and Other Vehicles Sold to Common or Contract Carriers	\$24,100,000.00
Commercial Vessels and Barges	\$1,800,000.00
Rolling Stock Used in Railroad Operations	\$8,500,000.00
Motion Picture and TV Film	\$2,800,000.00
Labor Input into Construction	\$341,800,000.00
Trade-Ins	\$78,700,000.00
Beauty and Barber Services	\$16,700,000.00
Live Bands and Orchestras	\$220,000.00
Health and Reducing Clubs	\$6,600,000.00
Admissions to Educational Events and Places	\$4,700,000.00
Veterinary Services for Pets	\$8,900,000.00
Dance Studios	\$100,000.00
Auto and Travel Club	\$1,640,000.00
Legal Services	\$77,600,000.00
Architectural, Engineering and Surveying Services	\$53,300,000.00
Accounting Services	\$45,800,000.00
Advertising	\$80,800,000.00
Computer Services	\$118,800,000.00
Management Consulting and Public Relations	\$49,300,000.00
Personnel Services	\$61,100,000.00
Addressing and Mailing	\$8,100,000.00
Credit Rating and Collection Services	\$5,900,000.00
Repair and Real Property	\$25,000,000.00
Interior Design	\$2,700,000.00
Janitorial Services	\$18,800,000.00
Disinfecting and Exterminating Services	\$2,200,000.00
Sewerage Services	\$20,600,000.00
TOTAL:	\$1,662,310,000.00

Based on 2000 figures. Source: *Kettl Commission Report*

Library Legislative Day January 29, 2002 Madison, Wisconsin

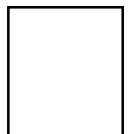


Sara Jermstad, Legislative Assistant to Senator Carol Roessler, discusses issues with Edie Phillips, Director of Winneconne Public Library, Laurie Magee, Head of Children's Services at Oshkosh Public Library and Ken Hall, Assistant Director, Winnefox Library System.



Senator Carol Roessler hears from constituents about the importance of saving library services.

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