



## 'FIREWORKS' AT WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE

The American enthusiasm for getting together and thrashing things out has been clearly manifested in the White House Conference on Library and Information Services held in Washington in November 1979.

The proceedings of the conference were made available through DIALOG's White House Conference Hotline, a first for this type of daily updated ready reference news reporting.

The Hotline was the result of the combined efforts of: Library Journal editors who prepared the copy; Information Access Corporation which processed the information into machine-readable form; and the Lockheed DIALOG Service which prepared the file for searching. Twenty-seven abstracts were prepared, and these summarise the activities, debates, resolutions and problems of the Conference.

Almost 2000 delegates assembled to discuss the broad issues concerned with information. There were five theme areas: Lifelong learning, meeting personal needs, improving organisations and professions, effectively governing society and increasing international co-operation. Broad issues indeed and issues which loom larger as the traditional techniques of librarianship give way under the impact of the computer revolution.

The aim of the Conference was to confront the major problems concerning the provision, management and use of information and to recommend legislation to Congress.

The idea for such a Conference was sug-

gested more than 20 years ago and is the culmination of 57 pre-White House Conferences.

President Carter addressed the Conference, and as Keith Doms (Director of the Free Library of Philadelphia) later observed, 'he pretty much told us to go home and solve our own problems'. It wasn't lost on anyone that even in an election year, President Carter couldn't come up with a promise of more money for libraries.

Alphonse Trezza, Director of the National Commission of Libraries and Information Science, interviewed at the start of the Conference, characterised it as a delegate's conference, and emphasised 'you gotta believe you'll have a successful conference and you will... this is what democracy is all about'. He wasn't shying away from possible fireworks: 'What we need is a donnybrook; get our differences out fast... Then the delegates will realise that they'll have to come to terms with their differences or the Conference will come to nought... It's a highly risky approach, but well worth the risk.'

Indeed there were fireworks. There was conflict from the word go, not only on the issues being debated, but also on the procedures for effectively debating them. The abstracts from the Hotline abound in such statements as '... despite all the threats of revolt...', '... the meeting's start was delayed by an interminable opening speaker and went downhill from there to a parliamentary brawl, with people stamping out into the corridors and threatening to lynch the

moderator...'; '... a vociferous subgroup who attempted to discourage debate with loud groans and cries on 'NO!' when a speaker tried for the floor', 'sweetness and light were in short supply...' and so on.

Despite these difficulties and because of the skills of two people, US Judge Abner Mikva and Edmund Reggie, Executive Counsel to the Governor of Louisiana, 3000 resolutions arising from the State Caucuses were boiled down to 34 resolutions to be developed in the five theme areas by small working groups. At this stage it became apparent that a great deal of consensus was developing, not only within theme areas, but also across theme lines.

One of the hottest areas of debate concerned the controversial National Library Act. The delegates voted 'yes' to the principle of such an act by a landslide vote of 369 to 108 with 16 abstaining.

After the resolutions had been voted on, the week was capped by a Congressional Hearing which was very well attended. Delegates appealed to the legislators for new legislation to serve special groups in society who are not now well served with information.

Whitney North Seymour, Jr took the floor with an appeal for the National Library Act, and former NCLIS commissioner Louis Lerner (now ambassador to Norway), urged that America's information potential be fostered to enable the nation to compete successfully with other nations: 'information is hot, political... and strategic... the US must be the leader'. Ralph Nader spoke earlier on information in terms of a struggle for power.

Of particular interest to Australia was the statement by Bernard Ostrey, Deputy Minister for Communications, Canada, who warned against the unplanned spread of communications and computerisation, raising spectres of a small nation's entire data store being located and managed by the information technology of a powerful neighbour and of such undesirable consequences as unemployment and loss of national identity.

### References

Gell, Marilyn K. The Politics of Information in *Library Journal*, v104(16) pp1735-1738, 15 September 1979.  
White House Conference Hotline (File 202) Lockheed DIALOG Service. Abstracts of proceedings. November, 1979. Copies of the abstracts are available from Katie Blake, PO Box J36, Brickfield Hill, NSW 2000, (02) 26 6344.

## WIN FOR KALAMUNDA LIBRARY

On Saturday, 3 November 1979 the ratepayers of Kalamunda in Western Australia were asked to register their support or otherwise for the building of a \$200,000 branch library at Forrestfield. Some 25 per cent of the population turned out to vote 5008 to 3433 for the construction of the library.

Results were as follows:

Number on roll	17,868	
Number voted	4,412	
Yes vote	5,008	(56.95%)
No vote	3,433	(39.04%)
Informal	4.01%	

The history of these elections began with the recommendation from one Councillor that he proposed library should be situated within the Forrestfield High School. This was thoroughly investigated by Council in August 1976 and September 1979 with the recommendation being rejected on three stated grounds:

- The school is sited on the extreme edge of the housing development;
  - Capital cost to add to the school to accommodate a library to suit Council's requirements would cost a minimum of \$130,000;
  - Management problems with joint usage will occur, and these coupled with (a) and (b) make the proposal unacceptable.
- In reaching this decision Kalamunda

Council expressed strong support for the concept of joint-use school facilities where the building, the site and the facilities had been planned to serve the library needs of both the school and the community.

The Councillor concerned, not to be defeated, raised a petition calling for a loan poll on the proposal to build the new library, despite a 40 to two vote against his doing so at a public meeting. He was able to collect sufficient signatures (300 out of the Shire's 32,000 residents) for the poll.

The issue became a major controversy and dominated the news pages and letters to the editor of the local newspapers for several weeks. Events became even more heated as another Councillor joined the move against the library and the two Councillors and their supporters campaigned vigorously and extensively in their local Ward.

Friends of the Kalamunda Library rallied to the library's cause and concentrated their efforts in the Forrestfield area. Results vindicated their support, with Forrestfield registering 1524 yes votes and only 92 no votes whilst that area supposedly supporting the two Councillors registered 498 no votes to 266 yes votes.

The Council will now proceed with the raising of a \$200,000 loan to build the branch library, heartened by the substantial support shown through the poll.

## Information riot

After many hours of agony (as anyone who has tried to get a new publication off the ground will know) we have the first issue of *Incite*. It is your Newsletter, don't hesitate - send your raspberries or bouquets.

Maybe some of you think *Incite* is a strange title... think about it... Libraries in the 70s didn't fare too well - let's have plenty of action in the 80s. The 'I' stands for information, so, in other words, let's have an Information 'riot'!

This Newsletter is dependent on you. We want to hear about new developments in library service, unusual activities (as long as they're printable!), features, new appointments and news items that are likely to be of interest to librarians elsewhere in the country. It is helpful if copy is typed double-spaced and kept brief and to the point.

Send all contributions to Irene Strachan, Publications Officer, LAA, 35 Clarence Street, Sydney, 2000. Phone (02) 29 7724.