



Virginia Walsh
Executive director

Canberra is a hive of activity. What follows is a peek at the local political scene.

The Federal Government is preparing for the May budget and there is much competition for the limited funding available as fiscal policy is further tightened and as attempts are made to reign in the current account deficit. The Government is facing additional difficulty in framing its budget because this will be the last budget before the election and it is a challenge to win the affection of the voters when you have just increased their taxes. Nonetheless, the information superhighway is still under construction and it is hoped that the political rhetoric on this issue will be matched by the allocation of resources to support this thrust. We are certainly working towards this goal. A full report on the Budget will be included in the April *inCite* — watch this space.

The election of John Howard as Leader of the Opposition has brought additional vitality to the political scene and to the proceedings of the Australian Parliament.

Both Houses of Parliament have been meeting. On 9 February in the Senate, the Deputy President advised his colleagues of the increasing demand for public electronic access to parliamentary materials. He explained that the parliamentary departments had been conducting a pilot service offering electronic access for Commonwealth agencies, State and Territory parliaments to a range of parliamentary materials and concluded that '...one of the evaluation group recommendations is likely to be that public access to parliamentary materials be provided through public libraries and community information networks to individuals via the Internet'.

During the recently held ACT

elections, the ACT Branch of ALIA effectively organised a lobbying campaign aimed at giving a high profile to library issues. Policy statements issued during the campaign have picked up on many of these issues, specifically the construction of programs providing community access to digitised information through the public library network.

ALIA conferences

In the affairs of our Association, this year — falling as it does between years in which our biennial conference is held — is often referred to as the 'off-conference year'. This is clearly a misnomer given the quantum of conference activity. There is definitely something for everyone in all library sectors — and we are talking big, professionally organised events here.

The *Online & On Disc* conference was held for the seventh time at the end of January and, to accommodate the demand for places by delegates and exhibitors, it was held at Australia's largest conference venue — Darling Harbour in Sydney. 1 300 delegates witnessed one of the most comprehensive displays of information 'high-tech' ever held in Australia.

The huge and ongoing success of this event is a tribute to the commitment and experience of the Information Science Section of our Association. This group has enjoyed continuity in the personnel of its conference planning committees and, by holding the event in Sydney, has capitalised on the advantages offered by one geographical site, especially when that site is purpose-built for events of this size and popularity.

Another reason for the success of the *Online & On Disc* conference is the critical importance of

The Government is keen to focus on One Nation, Working Nation and Creative Nation in its policy proposals. None of these can be achieved without the informed nation.

modern technology in meeting the information needs of our community. This is an issue critical to the future of libraries and information services in each library sector. To be assured of the deserved and continuing status as the skilled custodians and providers of information, the librarian, library technician and all others working within the sector must be capable of understanding how new technologies can provide the mechanism for delivering information in the most effective format. We must be prepared to demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of such an approach and continue to display, in a very public way, the relevance of information to the economic and social well-being of our nation. The Government is keen to focus on *One nation, Working nation* and *Creative nation* in its policy proposals. None of these can be achieved without the *informed nation*. *Online & On Disc* has demonstrated the importance of such a focus.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that the staging of ALIA conferences is demanding a more professional approach to site selection and event management. Happily, all our Conference committees are recognising this and are responding in such a way that we will see, over the remainder of this year, an excellent array of conferences that will satisfy the demands of the library and information sector for professionally-delivered and well-constructed professional development opportunities.

Congratulations to the Information Science Section on conducting such a successful event. For more information about upcoming ALIA events (if you are still deciding on your conference activities) please contact the National Office. ■