THE IMPACT OF FEDERAL LEGISLATION ON ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

Edmon Low

Federal aid to libraries is a fairly recent phenomenon in the library field. Librarians began their first serious bid for some funds to help extend library services to rural areas just after World War II and, after about a decade of effort, succeeded in getting the first Library Services Act in 1956 which thus became the first of a considerable body of federal legislation dealing with libraries of various kinds.

As I try to describe the impact of the various bills on a particular type of library—in this instance, the academic library—an important consideration must be kept in mind; namely, that a bill for one area which paves the way for or influences the action on a subsequent bill relating to another area provides an impact on this second area which is just as vital and real as if the bill had been originally designed for that area.

This certainly is the case with the Library Services Act. Then few seemed really interested in libraries: no administration would put the item in its budget, sponsors had to be searched out and persuaded, and even many of our friends were hesitant to come out and vote for libraries, partly because many still did not realize what books and libraries could do and what they could mean to people.

Apparently almost no one at that time anticipated how popular library legislation would become, and it was not until about five years ago, when the extension of the Library Services Act was voted out of the House Rules Committee by the most overwhelming vote ever given such a measure in the House, that people in and out of Congress, including the Administration, suddenly realized it was a popular thing to support libraries. From there on, library bills have multiplied and have been Administration bills, and the question has been not whether or not to support, but how much and how wide the application will be.

Therefore, although the Act authorized only $7.5 million annually and only $2.5 million was actually appropriated for the first year compared with the billion dollars authorized by the second session of the 89th Congress just closed for all types of

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libraries, we must not underestimate this humble beginning ten years ago, for it was on this foundation stone that our significant successes in the intervening years have been built. In this way this Act has had a vital impact on all types of libraries, including academic libraries.

In this paper I shall review briefly several acts which have had a direct and easily recognized impact on academic libraries, and then offer a few comments on the more subtle but perhaps the more significant impact on the thinking and attitudes of college and university presidents and administrators and librarians—the individuals whose decisions determine the position and policies of our academic libraries and in a large measure their importance and effectiveness in the educational scene.

To begin at the beginning, although I shall not always hold to a chronological order, the National Defense Education Act of 1958 may be mentioned first. Although varying considerably over the years in subjects included and not intended for libraries as such, it did, through its scholarships and fellowships to individual students with stipends to the institutions partly to cover instructional costs, provide considerable extra-budgetary money, a portion of which was very justly passed on by many institutions to their libraries. This was apparently used mostly for acquisition of materials and to help offset the constantly and rapidly rising prices, particularly of periodical subscriptions.

Following closely came Public Law 480 providing hard dollars to the Library of Congress to pay necessary costs of acquisitions of materials in certain countries with so-called "counterpart funds"—money owed to the United States but which had to be expended by it for materials in these countries. It must be noted the U. S. money was not used to pay for the materials—this was done with the counterpart funds—but for personnel to go to these countries to find and locate what was being published and purchase and ship it to the U. S. With a distribution of materials acquired somewhat similar to that of the Farmington Plan (the cooperating libraries were much the same in each case), a total of almost 6,000,000 pieces of material hitherto unknown and unobtainable has been brought to the Library of Congress and other research libraries and made available to scholars throughout the country. Obviously only the large research libraries were involved here but many other academic libraries benefited indirectly from this activity.

Following this also, in 1962 the new and expanded Depository Library Act was passed, permitting almost double the possible number of depository libraries, creating regional depositories, and providing for and directing the acquisitions of non-GPO documents by the Superintendent of Documents for distribution to depository libraries. The results of this acquisition of non-GPO materials, while fairly substantial when measured by the total of additional documents
distributed, have been disappointing when compared to the total po-
tential involved. Since over two-thirds of the present 850 depository
libraries are college or university libraries, this Act is significant
to this area and, as procedures are gradually worked out, the impact
will be correspondingly greater on these libraries.

To go back slightly, in 1960 came the beginning work on what
finally became the Higher Education Act of 1965. Since I was rather
intimately involved in this, I hope you will pardon the recital of a few
details of the birth pangs of this important legislation which will help
illustrate some points I wish to make.

I became President of the Association of College and Research
Libraries in 1960 and some of us, including the members of the Exe-
cutive Board, thought we should seek some federal assistance for
academic libraries to help meet the spiralling costs and added bur-
dens being imposed on them by burgeoning enrollments, increased
emphasis on research, the explosion of knowledge resulting in a
rapidly increasing number of publications, and the rising costs of
each item published. I, accordingly, as President of the Association,
took a proposal in October 1960 to the Committee on Governmental
Relations of the American Council on Education asking for support of
it by the Council in the forthcoming session of Congress. This plea
was not successful, but that is another story. Then on the advice of
Mr. Jack Forsythe, the Counsel of the Senate Committee on Labor
and Public Welfare and one of our good friends on the Hill to whom
we are all indebted for his interest in libraries, I sought the aid of
Congressman Carl Elliott of Alabama, then Chairman of the Special
Education Subcommittee of the House Committee on Education and
Labor.

I did not know Mr. Elliott but I knew that Dr. William Hoole,
Director of Libraries of the University of Alabama, was a good friend
of his. I therefore asked Dr. Hoole if he would try to arrange an
interview. He graciously consented and arranged a meeting at his
home in Tuscaloosa on a Sunday afternoon in December of that year.
I drove to Alabama and had a most pleasant visit during the afternoon
and evening, along with dinner, with Mr. Elliott, during which time
Dr. Hoole and I presented the case for the legislation. The upshot of
it all was that Mr. Elliott generously agreed that, if we would get the
proposal introduced in the upcoming session of the Congress and re-
ferred to his Sub-Committee, he would sponsor it and endeavor to get
it through his Committee and its parent Committee on Education and
Labor, and aid as he could in its progress through the Rules Commit-
tee and on the floor of the House when it came to a vote.

The plans of mice and men "gang aft agley," as the poet says,
and when Congress convened in January, President Kennedy tapped
Mr. Elliott to become a member of the Rules Committee, taking him
away from Education and Labor, and thus our labor all went down the
drain and we had to start all over again. Similar frustration for various reasons came time and again during the years before final success was achieved in 1965.

This legislation when introduced in 1960 had the very significant aspect in that, so far as I know, it was the first to propose direct aid across the board to academic libraries in privately supported as well as in publicly supported institutions. This, often referred to as the "church-state issue" although it is broader than this term implies, was a subject of hot debate during these years and the discussion of it in relation to this measure had considerable impact on other legislation which followed. An incident during a hearing on this proposal in 1962 before the Senate Sub-Committee on Education may well be related here. I happened to be one of the witnesses and, after I had completed my testimony, I was handed a note asking me to step into the hall outside to see Senator Yarborough of Texas. The Senator was a member of the Sub-committee and a good friend of libraries. He said to me, "You have an excellent proposal and I think the attitude of members of the Committee in general is favorable toward it. However, the Committee will convene in executive session immediately after this hearing and I do not think it stands a chance of approval unless I can insert an amendment saying that none of this money for material shall go to a seminary or other kind of institution whose major purpose is training for the ministry of any faith. Will you give me authority to add such an amendment and to say it meets with your approval?" I told him I had authority from the Association to give such approval and this provision agreed upon that day in the hall of the Senate Office Building now stands as part of the Higher Education Act of 1965.

I cite the above details to emphasize four points covering legislation which are often not recognized: (1) legislation of any sort must first be an idea in the mind of an individual or of a group and then be formulated on paper as a proposal, (2) the completed bill always represents the work and thinking of many individuals both in and outside of Congress and often is radically different from the original proposal, as was the case with the Higher Education Act, (3) several years, some say the average may be as much as ten, may well elapse from the proposal of legislation to the passage of the completed bill; and last and most important from the standpoint of this paper, (4) the impact on the thinking of the people involved, librarians, presidents, and educators as well as laymen and Congressmen, as hearings and discussions on a bill are held which provide information and expose different points of view, is very real and significant. Indeed, these people cannot discuss libraries for five years without coming to better understand their needs, their problems, and their basic importance, and thus to acquire an appreciation of them never held before.
In the meantime, and partly as a result of this discussion of library needs, sentiment began to develop for federal aid for buildings for colleges and universities. This was not only for libraries but for buildings of all kinds. This had a much shorter period of gestation and resulted in the highly significant Academic Facilities Act of 1963. The significance of this lay in the fact that it was the first act passed which provided money for both publicly and privately supported schools and, as such, is a landmark in our educational history. It was deliberately pushed ahead of the proposal for materials because an election was coming up in 1964 and Congressmen, always so aware of the need to be reelected in order to maintain or acquire seniority and influence, are naturally hesitant to support controversial issues. It is true both proposals cut across the church-state issue but books are much more susceptible than buildings to attacks in other ways. For instance, whoever heard of a communistic brick or a Catholic column or a subversive door or a pornographic window? We simply do not think of buildings in these inflammatory terms, yet they are applied with some frequency to books. Books contain ideas, they are explosive and therefore, from the viewpoint of a Congressman facing election, more dangerous. It is also true that, to many members of Congress, a building represents a completed thing which can be seen and understood, and is without further implied encumbrance on the budget, while requested aid for acquisition of materials seems to imply an ongoing, and probably increasing, expenditure year after year into the future.

So it is easy to see why buildings were put first, with quiet assurance to us that, if the Congressmen were not made martyrs on account of this in the impending elections, books would then be pushed. Even so, however, although the House had passed the bill for buildings without restrictions as to type of building, the Senate felt impelled to limit it to buildings for the popular natural sciences, mathematics, foreign languages, and libraries, a testimony again to the growing appreciation of libraries and their needs.

The bill passed, the Congressmen were not martyred; indeed, much to their surprise, the chief plaint was, "Why did you give us money for library buildings and then provide no aid for putting anything inside them?" and so the stage was set for the passage of the Higher Education Act and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act the following year. They were surprised too, as was a good portion of the educational community, that of the total funds made available under this act the first year, almost 40 percent was devoted by the presidents to libraries in competition with these other popular categories, and this last fiscal year, when the categories were removed and any kind of academic building could be built, about one-third was devoted to libraries in competition with all types of buildings. The greatest impact of this act, however, remains in its
successful bridging of the gap and bringing together all types of academic institutions both publicly and privately supported for aid and the consequent influence on legislation which followed.

And then came the Higher Education Act: aid for acquisition of materials, aid for training of librarians, for research into library problems and development, and aid to the Library of Congress in developing its shared cataloging program and acquisition of materials from all over the world. A whole paper could be written on this last topic alone with its great potential. It probably is the most important bibliographical undertaking to date by this organization, which is rapidly moving towards being our truly national library and is especially significant to the research libraries of the country. Likewise the promise of aid for acquisitions, particularly for the smaller and medium-sized academic libraries, and the aid for training of desperately needed librarians, will have a major impact in the academic area.

I phrase this last as a hope for the future, because the impact as yet has been less than hoped for because of funding. Fifty million dollars per year have been authorized for acquisitions, fifteen million annually for research and training, and five million and upward for the Library of Congress project. Last year only a little over one-fifth of this was funded; this year it rose to 50 percent, and hopefully further gains will be made in future years in both authorization and funding. The impact of this bill, then, is in its potential rather than in its accomplishment to date.

Finally, in reference to specific bills and their provisions, I wish to call attention to Title III of the recently passed Library Services and Construction Act providing for cooperation among libraries of all kinds towards providing the best library service possible for the people as a whole. I think this has particular significance for academic libraries. I think we librarians in this area, and this is my own area so I am criticizing myself also, have been very slow to recognize a wider responsibility which I think we all have outside our institutional walls. The time has come when we must all think not as a university librarian, a state librarian, a school or a public librarian, but simply as a librarian with an overall view towards better utilization of our total resources and getting the job done. The Higher Education Act, with its provisions for special matching grants, encourages cooperation among academic institutions, and presumably between their libraries, but this is cooperation between only one kind of library. In this Title III, it is for cooperation among all kinds of libraries. Only planning money has been granted this year and a small amount at that, but this may eventually have a very considerable impact on college and university libraries.

Finally, I believe that the most real and significant impact of all this legislation on academic libraries is not in the millions of
dollars already distributed, the buildings erected, and the books bought, but rather, as I said earlier, the impact on the thinking of the many individuals involved in these last half dozen years who hold the welfare of libraries in their hands. For instance, back in the beginning when I appeared before the Committee of the American Council on Education, I was given twenty minutes to state my case before a score of very prominent college and university presidents. I told them of the increase in publishing, the rising costs of serials, and that most of their libraries were then receiving regularly from 5,000 to 10,000 or more serials each. They could not believe it; each in turn kept asking me about his library and they kept me on the floor for more than an hour.

It was not the fault of their librarians that the presidents did not know this. These presidents were simply very busy men who had not read the reports of their librarians. I have seen this same surprise when they have appeared at hearings. The charts presented in hearings, showing dramatically how less than one fourth of the junior college libraries and less than one half of the libraries in four year institutions are meeting minimum standards, awakened not only college presidents and some librarians but also Congressmen and accrediting associations to how bad the situation really was. And there is nothing which attracts the president’s interest more quickly than accrediting demands plus the prospect of some available money.

With the librarians themselves, there has been the most heartening awakening to the fact that they can accomplish results in the political scene if they will put their minds to it and work at it. The college and university librarians have been very ineffective in this area compared to their counterparts in the public library field but they are learning, as are their presidents. For instance, a comparison of the halting and ineffective efforts of ARL libraries in 1961 and 1962 on P.L. 480 to utilize the counterpart funds, with the really sophisticated efforts in 1965 which, under the leadership of Herman Fussler, James Skipper, and other ARL members, devised the shared cataloging plan and secured its adoption and funding by the Congress in record time, shows how knowledgable and interested they have become. Similarly, academic librarians all over the country, in libraries both large and small, are talking to their presidents, and the presidents are talking to their legislators and to their college benefactors, all urging greater support of libraries, and they are now receiving this support far in excess of what is being received or is in prospect from the federal government.

Dr. Wagman, in the final paper in this institute, will speculate on the wonderful promise of machines and other library developments of the future. Suffice it for me to say here that I think a parallel can be drawn between our libraries and our highway system. We have had highways for years, lots of them, of sorts, and a good deal of
local choice of where we got on and got off, how fast we drove, and where we wanted to make a driveway and build a hot dog stand or a filling station. This system, however, just couldn’t get the job done: the roads became hopelessly clogged with traffic, the roadbeds could not stand up under the heavy trucks, and travel for a considerable distance was a nightmare. So we now accept, and welcome, the massive federal support which makes our burgeoning interstate system possible, and wonderful advances are being made. But when I get on one of these superhighways, I accept certain limitations: I have to drive above a certain minimum speed, I may not be able to stop off at some village that appeals to me, and I race across some sterile landscape when I might rather drive more leisurely down a winding, tree-shaded rural highway. So I accept certain limitations in return for the obvious benefits derived.

Our libraries are the same as our old roads. They are not getting the job done, and the principle of federal aid is somewhat the same. The promotion of multi-county libraries to serve sparsely settled areas, the necessity that academic libraries help undergird the many social programs of the Great Society, the demands that they support with their resources the tremendous programs of research under way, and finally the prospect of introduction of machines and computers and long distance transmission and proposed regional and national networks of information which may be as far advanced over our present library operations as the jet plane is over our superhighways, call for a whole rethinking of our concepts about the role of libraries of all kinds and I think we should gladly accept state and federal aid for our cause.

And therein lies the most fundamental impact of all of federal legislation: the fostering of the belief that we can now dream and plan far beyond our old horizons to build libraries and offer services not even thought of a decade ago and know that, if our dreams are good and our plans are sound, resources will be available to make these dreams come true in such a manner as to promote and preserve the greatest initiative in, and local control, of libraries in their wonderful contribution to our American way of life. This vision, I repeat, is the truly significant impact for us all.