

December 13, 2008

Communicating the Importance of Libraries in Tough Economic Times

Attention Library Board Chairs/BCLTA Liaisons:

In light of the current worldwide economic strain and the increasing pressure this places on government, it is important to remind our elected representatives that libraries continue to enjoy strong support among the public. In fact, as a recent Vancouver Sun article noted, in times of uncertainty more people tend to rely on the library "...to shave a few line items off the budget."¹

South of the border, public libraries are being hit hard by the crash in the housing market and the corresponding drop in revenue from property taxes. The consequent economic crunch has resulted in library hours being reduced, staff being laid off, and branch libraries being forced to close their doors. In response to this crisis, the American Library Association has requested \$100 million in stimulus funding from the federal government in order to "stem the bleeding of critical library services that help Americans with job searches, small business development, financial literacy and other essential assistance in hard economic times."² Let's not wait for a similar situation to unfold in BC. We need to ensure that libraries are recognized as the crucial social, cultural and economic supports that they are. Library funding must be maintained, if not increased, when our services and support are needed most by British Columbians.

Please take a moment to write to your MLA, the Minister of Education and the Premier (with a copy to BCLTA) to confirm your board's support of recent provincial investments in libraries and literacy – e.g., funding for OneCard, technology grants, virtual reference services, the Sitka project, staff training, library federations, etc. To abandon these important services and initiatives now would be a huge step backward after the gains made under the provincial Strategic Plan for Public Libraries. Help us keep libraries top of mind in these tough economic times.

Please see the attached letter to the Premier from BCLTA President Andy Ackerman as an example.

Footnotes:

¹ Library Reaches Far Beyond Books to Music, Film and More
www.canada.com/vancouvernews/news/westcoastnews/story.html?id=cd7884af-acfd-4da1-9bfd-7e1a3183929a

² ALA Seeks \$100 million in Stimulus Funding as US Libraries Face Critical Cutbacks, Closures
www.ala.org/ala/newspresscenter/news/pressreleases2008/october2008/WOstimulus.cfm

Other Articles/Resources:

Libraries Important During Economic Uncertainty
www.princegeorgecitizen.com/20081210165529/opinion/letters/libraries-important-during-economic-uncertainty.html

Library Funding to Help Get America Back on Track
www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/wo/woissues/washfunding/fedfund/Background%20-%20Stimulu.pdf

Branch Closings and Budget Cuts Threaten Libraries Nationwide

www.ala.org/ala/online/currentnews/newsarchive/2008/November2008/branchesthreatened.cfm

Obama's Concern over Closures Demonstrates Understanding of Libraries' Role in Economy

www.ala.org/ala/newspresscenter/news/pressreleases2008/december2008/woobama.cfm