

Director's Report

We are about mid-way in the 2009 Oklahoma legislative session. The legislature is required to adjourn the last Friday in May but has indicated that it plans to adjourn a week early by May 22nd. At this point most of the bills affecting libraries are those dealing with library funding. Bills to replace the tax on groceries, to lower the cap on the increase in fair cash value from one year to the next, and the appropriations bill for ODL are all still being considered. Discussions of reductions to the current fiscal year's appropriation and cuts to the coming fiscal year's budget are the subject of newspaper articles. We have not been asked for information by legislative fiscal staff for the impact of budget reductions on our services. The revenue reports in April which will be available in about a week will probably start the budget negotiations in earnest.

The other component of the state fiscal picture is the impact of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) also known as the federal stimulus package. Much remains unclear about how those funds can be used to balance the state's budget. I have attended meetings in person and by telephone on the opportunities for libraries in the ARRA. In the hopes of seeing some of the funds available to public libraries for repair and renovation of buildings, I contacted Oklahoma libraries for their building needs. I was able to meet with Secretary of State Susan Savage regarding these needs last week. While Secretary Savage was very sympathetic to the needs of communities for funds for public libraries, she does not believe that any of the funds the governor is responsible for awarding will be available for that purpose. I have been asked by Secretary Savage to join in discussions by state agencies about broadband initiatives which may lead to some improvements in the Internet bandwidth available to rural libraries. Again, these opportunities are very much under development and it is hard to predict how the federal agencies will draft the guidelines for grant applications. It is probably a job requirement to be able to tolerate high levels of uncertainty and ambiguity but I think we may be pushing the envelope with the current situation.

I attended the Western Council of State Libraries meeting in Wichita, Kansas the last two days of March. It was a good meeting with the opportunity to hear how other state libraries are faring in the budget situation. While some states are much worse off than Oklahoma, others in our region had surprisingly good news. Arkansas, for example, is looking at increases in funding for the coming year. It is encouraging to know that it is not all gloom and doom. I hope to have good news to share at our upcoming Board meeting.