

President's Message

Transforming Our National Agenda

by Leslie Burger

I know I make the very patient *American Libraries* magazine editorial staff crazy with my failure to meet established deadlines for this column. But one of the benefits is that I can write about the latest news.

It's Election Night and I'm sitting in my library's meeting room watching the results with about 50 community members— young and old, men and women, the politically affiliated and independents.

We are watching two televisions; one tuned to the local public broadcasting network and the other to CNN. Our local expert from Rutgers' Eagleton Institute of Politics is present, calling the races and offering commentary and analysis. The League of Women Voters is here too, canvassing the group to determine their voter experiences at the polls.

I could just as easily be tuned in to my home television dressed in my "jammies" and lounging on my comfy sofa, but I would much rather be here (with apologies to my husband who is sitting home alone). There's popcorn all over the room. People are comfortably ensconced for the evening. There is a wonderful interplay of conversation, clapping and cheering, and laughter. Some are using their laptops to one-up the networks on the results.

There is a slightly chaotic feeling in the library tonight, a mood that lets me know that we are doing things right. This is a night when democracy worked; when the people spoke about what direction they want our country to take over the next few years. It was in many ways a vote on the national agenda and has reinforced my belief that we need a similar agenda to help our libraries transform the communities we serve.

In early December, I will host an invitational meeting of library leaders and policy-makers in Washington, D.C., with the intent of developing a broad-based national agenda that can guide our work in transforming libraries of all types. We hope to use the information from this gathering to help us librarians continue



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the extraordinary work that we do to make the communities we serve better places to live, work, and attend school. I want to create a sense of energy and excitement for libraries in our country that has never been seen or experienced before.

The intention is simple: If we can shape a compelling, easy-to-understand

public agenda for libraries that ensures that every library user's experience is changed because of an investment in achieving that agenda, then we will have a single, unified message to share with federal, state, and local decision-makers.

The outcome of the meeting is just the beginning of what I hope will be continued conversations in January at ALA's Midwinter Meeting in Seattle and beyond. We will talk until we can agree (and I know we can) on a message that will not only improve libraries, but will result in communities that are being transformed for the better because we are here. I hope to go to Washington, D.C., on National Library Legislative Day with an agenda that will capture the imagination, hearts, and minds of our newly elected Democratic leaders.

I invite you to participate in shaping this agenda by allocating time for discussion during the Midwinter Meeting; at your library staff, trustee, and advisory board meetings; and in conversations with community members. This is our future and the future is now.

Back here in Princeton, New Jersey, on Election Night, I'm witnessing a visible transformation that was no doubt the result of the same kind of behind-the-scenes efforts we're about to begin. If we are successful, we, too, will witness a landslide of support. 

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