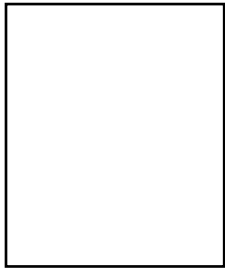


The Truth as we know it

Barbara Miller



When I see a movie with my kids, the issues that are important to them, just like Congressmen all have a discussion afterwards often leads me to lobby groups they are supporting with different agendas. I wonder whether we saw the same movie. GIS, for example, is comprised of librarians from several different public libraries and academic libraries, for example, who have different bills that affect them. The ultimate goal is to formulate a resolution or document that can go to the Committee on Legislation (COL) to represent a majority opinion of all ALA groups on a topic, which COL can then present to ALA Council.

Can a movie be good if it doesn't satisfy all these people? Well, most movies will not satisfy all these people, but still can be a great movie if it satisfies on many levels—if not all.

Closer to home, ALA members, along with the rest of the country, have spent a lot of time and verbiage on the problems of the last Congress and its lack of cooperation on anything that could move the country forward out of the recession. We group used of time on the Council floor). For example, anything with about the importance in their eyes of supporting their party rather than moving the country forward. However, we have only to look at our own organization to see that we are sometimes guilty of the same behavior. Do we support our unit of ALA and refuse to accept a document that could move ALA forward with compromise? Are we unaware of the issues important to the various other groups? ALA has to represent all these groups.

Recently, GODORT has had trouble moving forward with resolutions and working toward successful joint statements with other ALA groups. Now, GODORT itself has often been witness to sometimes caustic in-house differences of opinion on certain resolutions some members wish to put forth. Business meetings have often been witness to "spirited" discussions of this sort. This is normal, and it is valuable to entertain everyone's opinion on topics to arrive at something we hope will pass forward to higher ALA groups and to Council. Recently we have been unable to engage in meaningful dialogue with the Government Information Subcommittee (GIS) of the Committee on Legislation (COL). Often the discussions go beyond "let's see what all interested parties have to say" to a situation where we end up getting nothing passed because of violent differences of opinion between various members of these groups. Let me say this right now: I am not finding fault with anyone, but merely trying to find a way to move forward.

Granted, everyone coming to the table has valid reasons for their opinions, and every different group of ALA has different

Washington office is our link to the federal legislative arena, and it is our fault, and by our, I mean the smaller units of ALA on their staff are trained lobbyists who know what will work and who cannot agree. Even if we have to go over every document and what will not, when to act, and when to argue. There is also a legislative assembly of ALA, where various groups of ALA interested in government information can interact. All of these groups are possible venues for GODORT to vet potential resolutions to allow all interested parties to comment, and hopefully to arrive at a stronger document in the end—one that will be amenable to COL and will pass on the Council floor. This fall, thanks to ALA creating a new scheduling chart, GODORT has hopefully achieved a schedule which will allow Legislative Committee members (and especially the Legislative chair) to be present at many of these meetings. This gives us a chance to interact with all groups and see what will work and what will not work. Many people in GIS (including GODORT members on the committee) have different opinions. This is good, let's not forget that. However, it is necessary to compromise, because it matters not if what we have down on paper is the absolute truth as-we-know-it. We all know that the truth, as we know it, is only the truth from a certain point of view (thank you Obi-Wan). We, as documents librarians, spend a lot of time talking about bias being a good thing; and I often use various government agency views on certain topics to explain how different groups will all see a certain event differently, with different issues at stake. Yet, when push comes to shove, we are in there fighting like lions to get our resolution or our document passed, regardless of other opinions. Why not try to work out a plan that everyone can live with, that doesn't punish any part of ALA, or one type of library group as the "bad guys."

Life, as we know it, will not cease to exist if we cannot reach an agreement, but ALA needs something to put forth that represents the most groups. Regardless of internal bickering, if they cannot present a united front, it will look foolish to Congress.