ALBANY - (03/03/16, 10:30 a.m., 711-A LOB)

The Assembly Committee on Libraries held a roundtable meeting Thursday morning to discuss ways in which New York State can assist libraries. Chair Thomas Abinanti and Ranker Joseph Saladino were in attendance.

Joining them were Bernie Margolis, State Librarian; Scott Jarzombek, Executive Director of Albany Public Library; Michelle Young, Director of Libraries, Clarkson University; Brian Hildreth, Executive Director of the Southern Tier Library System; Timothy Burke; Executive Director of the Upper Hudson Library System; Mark McBride, Director of Library Services at Monroe Community College; and Mark Hill, Executive Director of the Metropolitan New York Library Council.

Abinanti opened up the meeting announcing that "this is something new" stressed that these types of work sessions bring good ideas to the table. The Chair then thanked the work of late Assemblywoman Barbara Clark and called for a moment of silence.

Each guest introduced themselves, starting with Margolis who described libraries as "critical to the success of every New Yorker" and brought along a leaf of a 1455 Gutenberg Bible. He framed his agenda by calling Gutenberg the "original computer scientist" asserting the role of changing technology in the preservation and sharing of information.

Jarzombek brought relevance to the idea of changing technology by noting that people wait in lines for access to Wi-Fi, or computers prior to library opening hours. He called libraries the "local drivers of economy" and the "socio-economic drivers" for their assistance in helping people learn digital literacy.

Young referred to libraries as the "intellectual core of universities" and as a "service industry." Young stressed need for financial stability and urged for the end of confidentiality clauses in contracts between libraries and vendors. Abinanti interjected to ask if vendors are controlling the distribution of intellectual information. Young
responded "absolutely" but stressed the need to work with vendors and respected their "right to make money."

Hildreth spoke next and "from a standpoint of rural libraries." He went on to show how the century old business model of libraries was undone by the advent of the Internet calling it a "huge paradigm shift." Hildreth mentioned the average $58,000 annual budget of a library and how a security breach on library cards would make the library liable.

Burke insisted that people needed to remember that "technology is just a tool to do a job" and in response to Abinanti described a library system as the support of libraries in member counties in need of financial or material assistance. Hill called the library system the "glue" and, reading from a prepared statement, noted the cost of upgrading Internet and how a library's character of content is affected by the network. Abinanti then quoted Marshall McLuhan, stating "medium is the message."

Hill called for diversified revenue streams, and highlighted how libraries should receive funding through pieces of the Economic Development, Education, and Health budgets to help with the various endeavors.

McBride started by calling it a "misconception" that the millennial generation is technologically prepared. He emphasized the role of economic status on the effect of computer literacy and affirmed that the "chances of taking yourself out of poverty is nil" without computer literacy.

The meeting had become much more informal by the time McBride began speaking and all those testifying began to list various things that libraries lend to Abinanti and Saladino. McBride continued speaking and stated that "we need to start considering vendors as partners, but we need willing partners." This was in regards to the removal of scholarly articles and other electronic publications being removed from a library after the expiration of a contract. McBride further stated that it is a "dirty secret" that professors often and willingly violate copyright laws to supply scholarly articles after removal from a library. Margolis and Young both interjected that in some cases the professor must illegally obtain their own publication do to these restrictions.

Abinanti suggested the possibility of bringing the "bargaining power of New York State" for electronic book contracts. Abinanti also called it a federal problem, seeing this a preservation issue for the benefit of posterity.

Margolis put forth that "Tom and Joe could draft a law tomorrow" to require at least one copy of all scholarly articles in an electronic medium to be "deposited" and preserved via the New York State Library for the purpose of keeping a public place for housing the work when a library’s contract was expired for certain material.

Hill urged the need to invest in digital infrastructure and Hildreth warned that history is being lost due to the inability of rural libraries to obtain and use new technologies.
Saladino asked what the impact of a raise in minimum wage would be on libraries. Jarzombek insisted that that there would be an impact as the cost for landscaping and building maintenance would necessarily increase with the cost passed on to the libraries. Jarzombek said the libraries would need an increase in grants from the state to match the increased cost.

Young saw the increase problem in being able to hire students to work at university libraries and stressed that she can not currently increase the pay of harder working students and would be hindered even more so.

After this, Abinanti's guest speaker was called in through video to raise a different question. Betty Davidson, described by Abinanti as a behavioral anylist brought up the potential of libraries in helping those with special needs, especially young children. All attendees, with McBride in particular, supported the idea of further increasing libraries' role in the lives of special needs children and showed interest in Davidson's computer program.

Jarzombek brought up the role of libraries in introducing refugees to America. He said how the libraries are where these refugees, some of which possess Ph.Ds in their birth countries, can "build their resumes back up" and are critical in bridging other gaps such as language.

Saladino reviewed the suggestions of those testifying, and Abinanti noted that "after Google and Yahoo we need libraries even more."

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