

Kenton Oliver and Roberta Stevens

Meet the candidates

Vote in the election this spring

The ACRL Board of Directors posed the following questions to the candidates for ALA President, and *C&RL News* is pleased to publish their responses. Each candidate was given 1,200 words in which he or she could respond to six questions; the responses are identified under each questions.

1. What do you see as the top three most important issues facing our profession today? What do you see that ALA can do to address them?

Oliver: Most of our library issues today stem from the broader issues of funding, intellectual freedom, and access to information. Funding concerns require us to advocate strategically for libraries. Intellectual freedom is a core value I have long fought for, including the right to privacy. Access to information includes everything from digital preservation to open access to scholarly communication to copyright and Google.

As ALA president I will encourage the divisions and interest groups of our profession to address these issues. The most effective ALA presidents show the capacity to engage member groups that understand the breadth and expanse of their specialties to allow them to drive our agenda.

Stevens: My wide-ranging experience has taught me that the need for adequate funding is at the heart of the most important issues facing our profession today. Without sufficient financial support, a library's collections and services cease to be responsive to users. With the recent retraction in the economy, the impact of diminished resources for all libraries is being dramatically played out before our eyes. Insufficient funding leads to staffing



Kenton Oliver



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and salary freezes or cuts. New staff with new skills cannot be hired, and with salaries stuck in place, the most talented and enterprising individuals are driven to other, better-paying fields. Professional development is often the first area to be sliced away, precisely at the time when staff most needs it to perform more productively and effectively. It is imperative that we have libraries with:

- up-to-date collections and technology,
- enough staff to provide services who are tuned into the latest developments in the field and motivated to provide the best service to users, and

- adequate budgets for hiring and promoting individuals to keep librarianship a vital and dynamic profession.

I am running for president of ALA with a pledge to ensure that every avenue for providing funding for libraries is addressed, both legislatively and through private support. I

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will build on the work of ALA's Washington Office in identifying potential opportunities for library funding at the national level and on the efforts of numerous areas within the organization to develop effective advocacy skills through online toolkits and training. I pledge to expand the association's advocacy strategies by enlisting the natural allies we have in the creative community of America's popular authors, 440 of whom have appeared at the National Book Festival. I have been able to see firsthand how diverse and articulate these individuals are. They have enormous potential as spokespersons for libraries as the fundamental lifelines of their communities, critical to the nation's economic, educational, and social infrastructure. We can draw upon them both to advocate for libraries and for the recognition of librarians as expert contributors to the learning process—from kindergarten through college.

2. Please share what leadership skills you would bring to ALA to lead and move the association forward given those issues.

Oliver: I am the candidate with the broadest range of experience in ALA and in library work. I have been advocating for libraries most of my adult life, either for ALA at the national level over the course of 30 years or for my libraries at the state and local level. One of my strengths is that I am well acquainted with our association: it is a complex organization requiring experience and understanding to navigate it successfully. I am a known advocate and proven leader in this association.

I recently completed four years as your chair of the Intellectual Freedom Committee, appointed by four different ALA presidents and often called upon to advocate for libraries and intellectual freedom. Prior to that I was an Executive Board member and before that I was the Kansas Chapter Councilor. I have served on various council committees as well as committees in sections and divisions of our association.

People who have worked with me agree that I do not work in vacuums, and I am col-

laborative. I understand that in our association we must have the right people and interest groups at the table as we make decisions impacting professional disciplines. I understand that as a large and diverse association we may not always agree, and may sometimes need to agree to disagree. However, as president I will ensure that ALA delivers its message in one strong voice, while seeking to impact public policy. My background in applying strategic planning and positioning will be invaluable as we complete the current strategic plan and move forward.

Stevens: I have worked in a wide range of libraries over my 35-year career: as a school library/media specialist, as head of media services for the National Institute for the Deaf at the Rochester Institute of Technology, as director of Technical Operations for the Fairfax County Public Library, and, among other responsibilities, as the head of major national projects during my 24 years at the Library of Congress, including its Bicentennial Program (1998–2000) and National Book Festival (2001–08).

At the Library of Congress, I led a nationwide project, in collaboration with members of Congress, documenting the local cultural traditions and events in their states and districts. My ongoing experience on Capitol Hill and in this political environment, combined with experience in all types of libraries, is a valuable asset as ALA pursues the passage of legislation to increase funding for libraries.

ALA's president is its chief spokesperson. The president must effectively represent a wide range of issues to members, the media, legislators and government officials, other organizations, and the general public. The president must consult, inspire, and motivate teams of individuals across the breadth of ALA's complex organization. My extensive experience heading up national projects, including the Bicentennial Program and the National Book Festival, with the involvement of high-profile individuals and thousands of people from within the Library of Congress, other government agencies and other organizations, matches the qualifications for the role

of ALA president. I will use these leadership skills and expertise in marketing programs to advance ALA's most important strategic goal, advocacy for libraries.

3. Describe your possible presidential initiative(s) and include the impact you hope your initiative(s) might have on ALA.

Oliver: Past ALA President Michael Gorman stated, "the few powers of an ALA president are transient and each incumbent can hope, at best, to raise issues, to influence discussion, and to represent this great association as best he or she can. As an association it is crucial that we complete and build on initiatives started by previous presidents, including ALA Ahead to 2010 and begin a new planning cycle. The issue of advocacy, always critical for ALA, is a building block for all ALA presidents. In addition, I will:

Support association-wide initiatives that develop library programs and services to help Americans deal with societal and economic turmoil. This includes advocacy for 21st Century Literacy.

Develop more formal ALA partnerships with allied professional groups, such as the Urban Libraries Council. ALA must reach out more aggressively to identify common ground and ensure the future of libraries.

Complete the National Discussion on Privacy. This critical topic is fundamental to our core value of Intellectual Freedom. ALA and its alliances must continue to take the lead in this important discussion vital to a healthy society.

Implement an action plan to address the plight of school libraries and media specialists. Rather than remaining in a reactionary mode as we watch the gradual erosion of trained media specialists in our nation's schools, we must advocate for the need for trained professionals.

Continue to ensure that diversity influences all aspects of ALA. The tools we are currently using, such as Spectrum, can be taken to another level.

Engage ALA's chapter voices in our processes. Chapters are the lifeblood of as-

sociation membership and should always be at the table as we plan for the future.

Initiate an association-wide discussion focusing on library and information schools as they define our profession's future through their curriculum.

Promote strategies to engage members of the new ALA Trustees/Friends/Foundations division.

Stevens: With local and state governments dealt a heavy blow from lower tax revenues and private philanthropy constrained by dwindling returns in the marketplace, the federal government is being turned to as the major source for funding to construct, renovate and update public facilities, and for additional support for collections and services. We need strong and well-connected advocates to make our case. Here is what I will do:

Enlarge the breadth and visibility of ALA's advocacy efforts, particularly at the national level, by using widely recognized authors to advocate for libraries and reinforce the message that librarianship and information navigation expertise is a 21st-century career choice

Employ my experience in fundraising to ensure tools and training are available for libraries, whatever their size, to grow financial resources for today and tomorrow.

Although ACRL has led the way with its rich array of opportunities for professional networking, ALA has not yet fully capitalized on the online offerings available across the association. With less dependence on face-to-face communication for sharing information with colleagues, ALA, as the premier library association in the world and a well-respected brand, is positioned to move more aggressively into the global marketplace. I will focus on broadening the number and diversity of ALA members nationally and internationally to increase its reach and revenue

4. What is your opinion of ALA's electronic participation discussions? What impact might an ALA electronic participation guideline/policy have on division members, for example, ACRL members,

who already have a variety of ways for membership participation?

Oliver: The Task Force on Electronic Participation Report was unveiled in Denver and as the ACRL Board comments reflect in that report, it is a complicated topic with multiple layers. While most of us support widespread participation, how we achieve it will have significant impact on the association's priorities. There is still confusion over what an open meeting really entails. Levels of participation and parameters in such things as discussion lists, committee forums, and governance committees remain unclear.

The potential impact for ACRL members is that they can participate in and monitor association business using technologies available to them without attending conferences and meetings. They might no longer be dependent on costly travel to engage the association.

ALA must have a thorough understanding of the costs associated with any proposal adopted by Council. Since the cost will surely be sizable and far reaching, ALA may find itself required to reduce budgets in other areas or increase revenues. As more members participate from home, conference registration revenues will surely drop unless a new model for collecting them is developed. Should attendance at our conferences decrease, it is likely ALA will see fewer vendors in attendance and lose the exhibitor revenue stream. This is a Budget Analysis Review Committee concern where I have extensive experience. I do support greater participation with a caveat that ALA look carefully at the ramifications and measure the consequences.

Stevens: Any policy or guideline for electronic participation must be broad and flexible enough to incorporate and not restrict the electronic participation activities already (successfully) underway within ALA's divisions. The ability to form virtual groups to address issues quickly is an association strength. Members play a meaningful role in the association, get value from their membership, and obtain advice and information needed to do a better job. Currently the discussion on electronic participation is focused primarily

on governance issues. On the divisional level, experimentation with electronic participation should be encouraged and the results fed into the discussion of what should be done association-wide.

5. For the past few years, ALA has been striving to upgrade the association's information technology capabilities. What is your opinion on ALA's progress in this area and what recommendations do you have for ongoing ALA IT issues?

Oliver: ALA has made progress in IT over the last few years. Division and section Web sites have improved. ACRL is a shining example of improvement and 2.0 applications. Forms of participation are growing with the use of wikis, podcasts, communities of interest, blogs, and Twitter. Association wide e-voting is coming into its own as a reality.

The issues ALA faces are similar to those faced in our libraries and our communities to provide a range of access points to the association for many different levels of sophistication. When a new technology arrives, not everyone is prepared to adopt it and move forward. However, ALA must provide additional emphasis to new technologies as a budget and staffing item. This transition will undoubtedly be accelerated when e-participation recommendations move forward.

Stevens: Upgrading information technology capabilities, as evident in the development of ALA's new Web site, has been painfully slow. There are many reasons, including the cost of software and site design, demands and expectations by members for access to specific types of information, the need for consultation in so large an organization, and the huge amount of data to be reviewed and transferred into a new structure. While I have been impatient with the speed of progress in addressing these deficiencies, I am wary of any top-down rush in the interest of moving forward quickly. I recommend committing more financial resources to upgrading the technology and using the expertise that has been incubating in the divisions for the design, development, and evaluation process for new services.

6. How should ALA position itself for working with a new U.S. presidency?

Oliver: When we look at President Barack Obama's change.gov, his transition team's Web site and agenda, it is obvious libraries of all types will play a critical role in revitalizing America. This agenda includes such topics as early learning, disaster planning, cyberspace, data privacy, civil liberties, and creative expression. ALA must build on these themes as it lobbies the new administration. This administration was one of the first in recent memory to react to transition team communications from ALA. That is why we are currently considered in early bailout packages by this President. He seems to get it. The key is for ALA to lobby at all levels of government as we communicate our need and potential. We must continue to position ALA and libraries as a cornerstone of American life.

For more information about these questions, and others, please visit my Web site at www.KentonOliver.com.

Stevens: As we have seen from President Obama's earliest actions, this is a new era in accord with our core values of free and open access to information. ALA can serve itself best by highlighting the goals it shares with the administration and demonstrating how libraries will work with the president as he brings transparency to the government and leads our economic recovery. We are off to an excellent start with ALA's letter to the new administration, recent press coverage of increased library usage nationwide, and the widespread distribution of Libraries stand ready to help in tough economic times. The drumbeat of how libraries are playing a crucial role in a tough economy must continue unabated. ACRL, along with the other divisions, can build the momentum by communicating specific examples of how libraries are helping Americans everywhere cope during this difficult period and playing a central role in making our lives better for the future.

More information on my candidacy is available on my Web site at www.robertastevens.com ¶¶

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