

**ALA PRESIDENT'S PROGRAM
ALA/CLA ANNUAL CONFERENCE
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>> PRES. MAURICE FREEDMAN: Thank you very much. Hi. I'm Maurice Freedman. Welcome to the 2003 ALA President's Program, "The Role of Libraries and their Support in the 21st Century."

I am delighted that so many of you were able to join me for this afternoon's program. We want to spend most of our time with our featured speaker, but I want to talk a bit about my presidency.

I focused my presidential initiative around the issue of better salaries and pay equity for all library workers. I'll try to do bulleted points, which will be a struggle for me, but we will keep it quick and brief.

Two major pieces to this: I appointed a task force that was to work on this, and there were approximately thirty people on it. They created working groups under it; it sort of metastasized. I don't know the count on the working groups, but between the two, at least sixty people were involved. Notable ALA junkies who are familiar with past presidencies and committees said this was the hardest working committee they have ever seen. I'd like everybody who was on the task force or one of the working groups to please stand up and take applause for what you have done for helping people get better salaries and pay equity.

(Applause.)

Thank you so much on their behalf.

A quick review of some of the things that the task force did: They did advocacy training at three consecutive Annual Conferences, so that people from state library associations all over the country were trained on how to go back and do advocacy workshops and to lead advocacy efforts in their respective states.

Secondly, Margaret Myers, a retired ALA staff person, did an extraordinary job in amassing and editing and putting together the Advocating for Better Salaries and Pay Equity toolkit. It's in its third edition at this conference. I'm going to do a website number here.

(*Web demo.*)

That's my home page, which is not the important thing, but this is the original task force. It only had about twenty people, but it grew as we needed, and other people got interested. This is the thing that I'm so especially proud of. What you have with a presidential initiative is people, speeches, occasions and training. But what persists through time is the printed word, regardless of what they tell you about the Internet, and the printed word is this extraordinary tool kit.

This is Bill Gates' fine print, just the last thing in the world I wanted to be talking about. I've got to accept this. This is what that wretched UCITA is all about. You can't use any of the stuff without accepting all the things that they put in print and you never read them. Right, Ralph?

(Applause.)

The libraries, open source software would have been interesting with him, but you know you take what comes with him.

Anyway... this is an extraordinary document. It's available for free off the Web. There are copies floating around all over the place and they have been distributed all over the country in a variety of ways. But if any of you are interested in doing anything about your salaries, and I urge every single one of you to feel empowered as of this moment if you haven't already felt empowered to do something about your salaries and get the kind of pay that you deserve, that is comparable to the pay of people with similar backgrounds, experience, skills, et cetera, in male predominant professions, this is the road map for you, to use a current phrase.

Okay. I'm proud of that. There's a whole bunch of working groups. I did this from memory so I can't mention all of them. Research and Resources, Unions, Publicity, Programs, Training, and others were what got the work done and produced so much of the fabulous outcomes from the task force.

Lastly, the website you're looking at was produced by Jill Uncyk, an ALA trainee. She worked and maintained that website and did an extraordinary job. There is just a wealth of information, more information about me than you'd want to see, but you don't have to look at it. That is the nice part about the Web. You can pick and choose.

But related to the salaries effort, there is just a ton of information. I urge you to take advantage of it. Help yourselves and help everybody else in the process.

Now, I want to talk about my involvement and a bit of what I see as having been

accomplished as a result of my administration. The ALA Council did something historic for this association, probably one of the greatest decisions it made. I don't know what their perception was, but I was thrilled and delighted. It was a great decision. They created an Allied Professional Association that has, for the first time in the history of the American Library Association, empowered the association and its members to advocate and fight for better salaries and compensation and issues near and dear to the working members of the American Library Association and all libraries. That was a historic and great achievement. So let's hear it for the Council.

(Applause.)

Some of the power that you have as ALA President is totally fictitious or worse. But, one of the nicest things was that nobody could say "no" when it came to deciding who I wanted to speak at the conferences. What made it especially terrific was there was someone in the business community who worked with libraries who was so kind, generous and gracious to provide the dollars so that it didn't have to be a point of conflict between the association and the President over where the money would come from or whether we could have such speakers during the American Library Association's Presidency and "president-electancy."

I'd like to bring up here to the microphone, bring up here for a resounding ovation, the man that made it possible. I'll give you the list of speakers that I either selected or had a major role in selecting and finding the money to pay for: Michael Moore, Barbara Ehrenreich, Amy Goodman, Ralph Nader. And on Tuesday morning, I hope you'll be here to hear Naomi Klein, an expert on globalization and NAFTA. I want to invite to the podium Jack Blount, President of Dynix Corporation. Jack?

(Applause.)

>> JACK BLOUNT: Thank you very much. I won't waste your time because I know you're not here to hear me. I want to thank all of you for being brave and coming up to support this first combined ALA/CLA in over forty years. So my thanks to you.

(Applause.)

>> PRES. MAURICE FREEDMAN: I've been around 37 years, and I don't think I ever heard a vendor get that kind of ovation. Thank you, Jack. That is wonderful.

I did a lot of public speaking and advocacy on the issue of better salaries and pay equity. My colleague and friend from my office, Mary Berman, tallied all the places that I went to, and

she said 33 cities. Including the US and Canada, it came to thirteen countries. So, to the extent that I could do it, I went everywhere I could and spoke passionately and strongly on behalf of all of us who are here today and the people we want to come into this profession so our libraries can have staff in the future who are trained and competent to do the work. They are not going to be coming into this profession if the salaries aren't changed to the better.

So, that's my particular piece of the advocacy -- running around all over the place and giving those speeches. I was happy to do it.

Two things came out of that that I will mention very briefly. People came up to me afterward and said, "I didn't feel like I could ever do anything about it, but as a result of having listened to your speech, I am going to go back and try to do something about it." So on a one to one basis that was fabulous. It happened several times and it really was part of the encouragement that gave me the energy to keep going.

The second thing, though, was more in the way like the APA was created. The associations -- the state and regional associations at which I spoke, every single place, every single association -- appointed a Better Salary and Pay Equity committee or recharged an already existing committee to work on this issue. That's the kind of thing (that is the institutionalization, the bureaucracy) that is positive and critical if this issue is going to go forward. It's not dependent upon who is President at a given time. It's wholly a matter of an organization finding a way to support it, building it into its organization, and moving people through it on the committee. That is the real legacy, the institutionalization and the standing committees of the ALA-APA dedicated to this work. That is how it's going to go forward, the staff that ALA is going to hire and the budget that the APA will have.

The last thing will be just informational: some of the countries I went to and I'm going to talk about. Great Britain and the Scandinavian countries, Denmark and Norway. I spoke to a woman from Sweden at the IFLA meeting in Glasgow. First, Great Britain. The library association called the Library Association changed its name to the Chartered Institute for Library Information and Professionals. I won't get into why the change and the difference in the name, because there are a lot of people in Great Britain who addressed that. But the American Library Association, anyone who wishes to, can become a member of it. Anyone. The sole criterion is paying dues.

(Laughter.)

You know, it's the strength and if you want to say weakness, but it comprehends and brings everybody into it. It provides resources that are truly extraordinary. There are other sides to it. And that's why I'm mentioning these other nations. In Great Britain, to become a member of the organization, you have to qualify, fill out an application blank, your work experience, your educational experience -- and they have criteria that you have to meet before you will become a member of the Chartered Institute. In effect, become chartered. They have very rigorous requirements.

On the other hand, they didn't have to go through any soul-searching the way the Council and the association did on advocating for their members. Somewhere back in the mid '60s a decision was made that we were going to aggressively advocate for salaries for our members and help them in local situations, in an advisory capacity, which is one of the directions ALA can take.

So that is how things worked and there's only one association there that represents the library -- in effect, deals with the libraries. But it's an association of member librarians and library workers.

In Norway and Denmark and Sweden there are separate unions for librarians. I don't say library workers in this case. There are library unions and library associations. They are separate.

In Copenhagen the librarians had an exquisite building. They are totally separate. ALA has it all under that one umbrella with the APA. So again, our association, through its breadth of membership, makes it possible, we hope and trust, to succeed at advocating for the institutions and the intellectual freedom and precious ideas and values of the association, but now also for its members, where it hadn't in the past in regard to its members. They separated those issues in Scandinavia. I think one of our strengths is that we have the potential for doing all of that.

The reason that they don't have the support staff in their unions is that they have separate unions for them. Everybody is clearly and distinctly organized. I thought you'd really love hearing about that, and that I'd share that with you.

Okay. I've got to go back to the script now and do a proper job of introducing Mr. Nader.

Going beyond the presidential initiative. As my presidential year unfolded, another important issue emerged, that of funding our nation's libraries. It became clear that we were in a crisis situation and that we, as an association, had to take decisive action to save America's

libraries. At the 2003 Midwinter meeting in Philadelphia, ALA launched a new campaign, the Campaign to Save America's Libraries. Those of you who were at the rally in Philadelphia heard from our colleagues about the ramifications of the deep budget cuts that had effects on libraries across the country, my own included.

In a recent poll, the ALA learned that more than ninety percent of adult Americans believed public libraries will play an important role in the future. An accompanying study confirmed that when the economy goes down, public library use goes up. I find it particularly outrageous, I take it personally and I'm furious about it, that at the time that public libraries are serving record numbers of people, that's when they are cutting public line budgets. I can't think of anything more outrageous -- well, there are lots of things more outrageous than that, but that's terrible.

(Applause.)

Misplaced values, goal displacement, those are terms that come to mind. Students visit school libraries almost a billion and a half times during the school year, about one and a half times the visits to state and national parks. Research shows the highest achieving students attend schools with good library media centers. Academic librarians answer 97 million reference questions each year, almost three times the attendance at college football games. The library could be funded with the salary of the head of the physical education department and the football coach.

And yet in the face of evidence that libraries matter, libraries are vital, libraries are essential to our democratic society, we must continue to fight for the survival of our libraries.

Today's speaker, well-known consumer advocate and founder of the DC Library Renaissance Project, Ralph Nader, knows that we can't just sit quietly while the funding is slashed, our programs and services decimated, and our future hangs in the balance.

Alarmed by the steady decline of the Washington, DC Library System due to budget cuts, he established the DC Library Renaissance Project in December 2002. His goal is to generate community, political, private and foundation support to improve the DC library system to a world class standard.

The project is funded by grants from the Catherine Reynolds Foundation, the Cafritz Foundation, the Washington Post, the Kiplinger Foundation, the Olender Foundation, the Wall Street Foundation, the Carnegie Foundation, National Geographic Society, many area law firms

and interested private citizens.

The one missing name there is the United States Congress that holds it as an entity where its citizens can't vote on their budget, can't vote on their officials, and can't do anything substantive about their library.

(Applause.)

Honored by *Time Magazine* as one of the 100 most influential Americans of the twentieth century, Ralph Nader has devoted his career to giving ordinary people the tools they need to defend themselves against corporate negligence and government indifference.

In 1965, Mr. Nader catapulted into the public sphere with the publication of his book *Unsafe at Any Speed*, an exposé of the disregard carmakers held for customer safety. The book resulted in Senate hearings into the accusations and the passage of lifesaving motor vehicle safety laws.

Building on the momentum of that success, Mr. Nader worked with lawmakers in the creation of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Consumer Product Safety Commission. He helped draft and pass numerous laws that have made our world safer, including the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Meat and Poultry Inspection Rules, the Air and Water Pollution Control Laws and the Freedom of Information Act.

Mr. Nader has formed numerous citizen groups to empower the average American: the Center for Auto Safety, Public Citizen, the Pension Rights Center, the National Coalition for Universities in the Public Interest, and the Student Public Interest Research Groups that operate in over twenty states. In his latest citizen initiative, he is working with alumni classes, including his own at Princeton University and Harvard Law School, to expand their efforts beyond parties and reunions to community projects that systemically advance social justice. What a concept!

Believing that Republicans and Democrats are so close ideologically that there is no meaningful choice for voters, Mr. Nader organized a presidential campaign in 2000 to challenge the two-party system and stood for election as the presidential candidate for the Green Party. His goal is to build the foundation of a third political party and a robust progressive political movement that rallies around issues rather than slogans and figureheads.

Ralph Nader is the author of *Winning the Insurance Game*; *Why Women Pay More*; and *Getting the Best from your Doctor*. His most recent books are *Children First: a Parent's Guide*

to Fighting Corporate Predators; No Contest: Corporate Lawyers and the Perversion of Justice in America; The Ralph Nader Reader; and Crashing the Party: How to Tell the Truth and Still Run for President.

There will be a question-and-answer session at the conclusion of Mr. Nader's remarks. Mr. Nader will also be available after this program to sign books in the foyer outside the auditorium.

I'd like to mention that this program is being captioned for hearing impaired and videotaped. The captioned text and video will be posted on my web site: www.mjfreedman.org in July. It takes a while to prepare the presentations for posting, so please be patient. You can check at a later date about text and a webcast, if you don't find what you need.

Sorry for all the commercial for ALA and the presidency and the task force and all the rest of it.

It's my great pleasure to introduce and bring to the podium Ralph Nader.

(Shouts and applause.)

>> RALPH NADER: Thank you very much, Mr. Freedman and ladies and gentlemen. I was -- I thought this was voice recognition, because it was so fast. And Mr. Freedman said no, it's someone who is incredibly fast. Converter.

(Applause.)

So I'm going to -- I'll give the person a test.

(Laughter.)

Here goes. Onomotopoeia.

I can't tell, because I don't know how to spell it. Is it right?

>> AUDIENCE: No.

>> RALPH NADER: The answer is p-o-e-i-a. Nice try.

It does show a great advance. For those of us who grew up years ago, it was very hard for people with disabilities to participate. That's one of the great breakthroughs in the last thirty or forty years. We are entitled to credit for that success people with disabilities who did it themselves.

(Applause.)

It's just getting the ADA law through and sitting in on Joe Califano's office, Health and Human Services. Just another example that if we want to change something, the word is "we,"

not “they.” They will follow when we lead, or they will leave.

The preliminary point I want to make is that there is a signup sheet out there for those of you who are interested in the following: One, we would like to get successful models that you think are unique, working in your community regarding libraries, whether events, programs, different ways of reaching out and so on.

And, second, we would like you to give us your ideas on how to raise everyone’s expectation levels for libraries, because the first step in getting community support is to raise everybody’s expectation level of what a library system is all about. That is called reaching for the moon.

And, third, we do have some very good books that we would like to send to you free. But we don’t know whether you have them or whether you want them. So if you could leave your cards on the table out there and/or sign the sign-up sheet and just indicate “books, “ I’ll understand. We will be in touch with you.

And then, finally, to the extent that we can visit some of your cities and towns, we would like to be in touch with you as well.

You’ve asked me to speak with you on the issue of library budgets, among other things. The budget crunch being felt by most libraries comes down to about 15 to 25 percent cuts in many cities around the country, maybe some even more. This disaster, coming after a spectacular growth of the economy in macro terms in the ‘90s, is falling heavily on all libraries, but also public libraries. There are school, high school libraries, that are just a shred of their former self.

When I was in high school, I rummaged around the high school library and I found my way into a closet. It was full of all kinds of paper, old newspapers, and back Congressional Records. I saw the Congressional Record and I was totally overwhelmed. Some people read seed catalogs. I learned how to read the Congressional Record.

(Laughter.)

At that time, we could write to our member of Congress and get a free subscription. If we wanted to pay for it, it was \$12. Now, I understand it’s about \$400, and not many people are able to pay for that. There are no more free subscriptions. Congress has cut enormously its capacity to produce hearings, to publish an adequate number of hearings and reports and other materials. At the same time, they have more than kept up to date their congressional salaries and

health insurance and housing deductions, and all the other freebies that they get. I can't get anybody interested on Capitol Hill about the question: How do they provide more copies of what they produce to more people at zero or minimal cost? Indeed, the cost of a hearing now can be \$20 or \$25 from GPO.

When I was in high school, a dollar was considered a high price. You can adjust for inflation and you're still nowhere near what the cost is at the present time.

The respect for the book is clearly being lacerated in many ways, and the respect for libraries is an indication of whether our culture is expanding or is in decay. If you want to come from Mars and ask one question, "Is your culture in decay?" the best answer to determine that is to check out the state of community support for libraries. That is the best way to check it out. Not look at television. Not go to theme parks. Not go to gambling casinos. Look at the libraries.

The impact on libraries tends to be described in abstract terms, yet that has very, very concrete consequences in terms of what people do with their lives, where they act, how they act, how they improve the society, how they become good ancestors.

It is important, for instance, to look at library service from many levels. Starting with book collections, of course. But there is no better description than what appeared in this new book *Patience and Fortitude* by Nicholas Basbanes that just came out on libraries. I don't know if you've seen it. This is the cover. On page 365 is the following paragraph: "In April 1998, on the occasion of the Boston Public Library's 150th birthday, Kevin Starr, the state librarian of California, offered some words of recognition: 'Right from the start, the Boston Public Library signaled a movement that said, Where do you find the city? You find it here. In city after city, the public library becomes the shared public space. It is an area in which the poetry, the history, the identity of a particular community is expressed. And the Boston Public Library does this gloriously in terms of its setting in Copley square, in terms of the grand architecture, in terms of its intellectual identity. It says, here is something fine and enduring about Boston.' " He might have added, "And they're damn lucky it was started 150 years ago."

(Laughter.)

Besides book collections and all the problems involved now in book collections, the *Harry Potter* phenomena is diverting a lot of money to buying dozens of *Harry Potter* books from other books that could be purchased. On the other hand...

(Applause.)

On the other hand, it brings a lot of children to the library.

(Applause.)

So I remember when I was growing up, we would get exhortations from our elders, and the exhortations would be, “You need to read this particular book or that particular book.” As an example of our cultural regression, the exhortation today to children is, “You need to read.” Just, please, read! Don’t just gaze at screens. Just read.

(Applause.)

I was listening to C-span radio the other day and Vice President Cheney’s wife, Lynn, was hosting at her home in Washington, with the head of the National Endowment for the Humanities, a little session with 9, 10, 11-year-olds from the local Washington area. It’s a new project coming out, I guess, and they were both exhorting the students to read. After they said, “Reading is important for you,” came the following sentence: “And in many books, the pictures are very, very beautiful.” Catch that.

And there were recurrent commendations to the children for being able to sit still for 30 minutes in front of the Vice President’s wife, Lynn Cheney. Sit still.

Well, of course what television has done is shrunken attention spans for at least two generations of children and has reduced their vocabulary enormously to a point where most children today have a working vocabulary where they can get along perfectly well on 200 words, making it totally unnecessary for them to think of studying Esperanto.

“You know, sort of like, cool, you know?” Believe me! “You know? Sort of! Cool. Like. Like... like.”

(Applause.)

I once was sitting with seven students from a Northwest college in Oregon and one of the students, and I counted it, she used “like” at the 50 percentile. That is one out of every two words was “like.” I since have corresponded with her four times. I sent her books. And she is weaning herself off that awful word.

(Laughter and applause.)

I suppose we should be grateful that “like” has replaced a lot of profanity in speech. It’s hard for the two to coexist, those four letter words.

Now, besides book collections and there is more to say on that, which I’m sure you have

heard a lot about at your meetings, there is a multiple definition of literacy. In Washington, DC, according to the Department of Education, 37 percent of adults are functionally illiterate. They can hardly fill out an employment form or understand it. Thirty-seven percent functionally illiterate. There are many third world countries that do better than that, including Cuba, I might add.

(Applause.)

What is it about our country that tolerates that level of illiteracy? Well, that is something that could go on for days, obviously. But clearly the libraries can do a great deal to diminish that level.

For one reason, there are a few bureaucratic rules in place that once the literacy programs are in libraries, the focus is on literacy. Literacy. Paulo Freire, Brazilian educator, taught Brazilian peasants how to read in a few months. It wasn't full time; in a few months. When you're working with small children, teaching them how to read, it's not one of humankind's greatest challenges, unless you're trying to do it in a bureaucratic structure. Then it becomes an immense human challenge.

Now we hear a lot about computer literacy, and I suggest that we work on literacy before we get to computer literacy.

(Applause.)

There is civic literacy where libraries become public space for people who want to tackle some problem at City Hall, want to take on some corporation that is abusing its power in the community with some toxic dump. They want to go to the library to not just get information, which is important, but maybe they would like to go to the library to sit in on civic skill training sessions. Great material, easy to do. Every city and town has active citizens who would love to volunteer to teach people and youngsters how to become skilled citizens. If you become a person who has civic skills, you're not going to go through life saying: "Que Sera," or "You can't fight City Hall" or "You can't take on Exxon." You'll go through life much more engaged because you have the tools.

How do you use the Freedom of Information Act? How do you put on a news conference? How do you move and form a coalition? How do you overcome discouragement and burnout? How do you develop a civic personality? How do you learn how to negotiate a more equitable tax system in your community or in your state or your nation? How do you

investigate a corporation so that you know how to develop a strategy around your findings?
How do you do an easy voting record in a very compressed space of time for your state legislature or for your member of Congress?

Civic skills. They are not taught in the schools. Libraries have very little competition, unfortunately. They are not taught in the schools. They should be taught in the third grade and sixth grade and ninth grade. Civics itself is hardly taught as its original meaning. They have government courses where civics is taught. The books used in class are so dull, reading these books is like eating a ton of sawdust without butter.

Our government is made up of three branches: legislative, executive and judicial. Well, that is so exciting that a not-too-recent poll concluded that more high school students knew the names of the Three Stooges than the three branches of government.

(Laughter.)

This amazed me because I don't know the names of the Three Stooges. I have a hard time describing who they were. But civic literacy, civic training courses, very happy to show anyone who is interested in this, and maybe it can spread all over the country.

People do not want to go through life powerless. They have grievances, they have a sense of injustice, which is the prerequisite to having a sense of justice. They have complaints and they feel they can't do anything about it. And then it builds up, an enormous implosion of depression. Then we read about it in terms of the pharmaceutical industry: "Well, we have a drug for you." Well, my drug for people who have depression is to give them power so they can shape their future and shape the future of their country, and not simply run to the pharmacy to get a drug.

By the way, antidepressant drugs often lead to dry mouth. Dry mouth leads to cavities. You go to the dentist and you say to him, "I have dry mouth." He will say, "Are you talking antidepressants?" And you say yes. He says, "That's why you have a lot of cavities." And what do I do about it? He says, "I have a drug." And you take the anti-dry mouth drug, and it has another effect. I'm sure they have another drug for that.

Civic skills and involvement are a great way to pursue happiness, and the pursuit of justice is one great way to pursue happiness.

And when you get involved in it, because you can improve things in your community, you get such gratification when this occurs. Then you can reverse it and the pursuit of justice is

the pursuit of happiness. That can happen in libraries. Let me hear from you -- do you agree?

(Applause.)

It doesn't cost that much. As long as you have a little space, you have people from the community beginning to stream in, small groups, great materials, six, eight, ten sessions, then get a certificate. Skilled citizen. So when they meet each other on the street, they say, "How is your skilled citizenship coming? How is your epicenter of influence coming?" It's time to replace some small talk with big talk, given the state of our country and our world.

We are four billion people trying to live on two or one dollars a day. So many other things bring shame on the human intelligence in terms of our inadequate mobilization. Knowledge. Someone long ago said we will forever govern ignorance. But we have to have that knowledge accessible, vibrant, current, historic, meaningful, pragmatic, theoretical, inspirational, artistic, civic -- all the dimensions.

Another form of literacy is consumer literacy. Too many people are taken in the marketplace and they lose about a quarter of their income because of fraud, deception, shoddy merchandising, prevaricating, advertising products that should never be bought in the first place, and coming in with very little bargaining power. Now, libraries can be places where consumer skills are taught. Very good materials, very inexpensive to have consumer skill clinics. You have people in the community who would be very happy to volunteer. That's another opportunity to show what the library is all about.

Artistic events: there is so much talent in cities and nobody hears about it. How can they hear about the great authors, musician, performers, the great minds? How can they hear about them, or see them when they turn on the television and radio, and it's ninety percent advertising and tawdry entertainment? So they decide to log into the late evening news. And what is the late evening news in city after city? It's thirty minutes. Nine minutes of ads. It starts out with street crimes superficially covered. And then you get the first weather forecast. The thirty minutes news is four minutes weather, four minutes sports, one minute contrived impromptu chitchat between the anchors. And the weather comes on. It's like a tease: "Are you going somewhere next weekend? Stick around, we will let you know, there's a tornado or something."

Then they move on to maybe a story from City Hall and then the prescribed animal stories. There has to be human interest. Animal story. The latest report from the *New England Journal of Medicine* for the latest breakthrough you won't see for thirty years. Then the second

weather comes on. Now he has Dopplar radar. In Washington they start with a front over the Cascades having come in from Canada -- thank God for the cool air from Canada -- and moving over the Prairie. You're saying, "What is the weather in Washington? Tell me." They are not finished. They have all the suburbs around Washington, four miles apart. And they start 61 degrees here, 62 degrees over here.

(Laughter.)

And then, the next one later on, they have five-day weather forecasts, right? And then just before they sign off, the anchor looks at you and says, "Stick around, we'll be back with the weather update." Weather update? Two minutes, weather update.

In other words, the culture of the city is not shown on our public airways, which belong to us. We are the landlords, and radio and TV are the tenants. They pay us nothing for the license to the FCC and they decide who says what and who doesn't 24 hours a day. That's why we don't have --

(Applause.)

Try to get a library story on the late evening news? You'd have to sack it. Not use it. Not expand it.

And so our culture is in decay and we have got to do something about it. The more people and youngsters who stream out of your libraries with civic skills, with consumer skills, with a broader vision of what they are about, with a higher level of their own expectations in life, with a higher estimate of their own achievements in life, that's going to help everybody, including libraries. So you're generating your own supporters and community backing.

We have a website for the DC Library Renaissance Project. It's called savedclibraries.org. When we started this project, it came about because of a reporter in the *Washington Post* who did a big takeout on the decaying tragedy of the nation's capital library systems. Where in the '70s, they had over 600 staff, now they have 400 plus. In the '70s, they had 1.4 percent of the DC operating budget. Now it's seven tenths of one percent and with more branches and more complications than in the '70s.

As I read this, I was so stunned, because I worked mostly on the federal government. I don't really engage the DC government. But I was so stunned that I literally blushed with shame, empathetic shame, because I know in Washington there are very wealthy, powerful, talented, literate people who obviously didn't connect with their library system. These are

people who get their calls returned. They didn't connect. The beleaguered library staff and the director, who is here today, Molly Raphael, just swing in the wind.

The first path of least resistance is the library whenever there was a cut. The budget is so the small it couldn't offer itself up for the sacrificial cut, but that is where it would go, because the library budget was not a power budget. Library budgets have got to become power budgets. That's how it has to be.

(Applause.)

I'll give you an example of a power budget. It's called the corporate tax abatement power budget. It's called Intel Corporation, one of the most profitable corporations in the history of the world. Dangling its new plants in front of communities in the west and letting them bid. The way these towns bid for a billion-dollar-plus Intel chip plant is to give away the store. To say, "Well, you don't have to pay property taxes to support the police and the Fire Department and the schools, which have to service your expanding executive and workforce. And we will do this for you, and do that for you, and give you some subsidy and this abatement." You know what it amounts to in a town where Intel is? It saves Intel \$50 million per town a year and some of the towns are not that large.

There is one outside of Albuquerque. Intel was so embarrassed after a while. The CEO has a head on his shoulders. He said, "What are you going to do? They throw themselves at us. We have an obligation to the shareholders." I said, "Mr. Grove, you've got an obligation to your conscience." He said, "Well, we built them a \$3 million new high school." Boy, that is a real giveaway. Let's see, that is about three weeks' worth of the tax abatement. That is generosity.

Intel is ahead of the pack. The others don't even think of it. They just leave massive holes in the ground from their mining operations.

But that is a power budget. They descend on the Mayor and the City Council and the office buildings in Cleveland or in other cities get tax abatements. That is the game they're playing. Those tax abatements are billions of dollars at the local level. Marriott gets tax abatements. Hyatt gets tax abatements. Department chains get tax abatements. "We are not going to open up on this line of your municipality unless you give us this, unless you give us that." Corporate welfare. Corporate welfare towers over poverty welfare services in sheer dollars.

Canada is no stranger to this as well, considering the corporate welfare they gave to its oil

industry.

By the way, I have to say a word about Canada, since we are here --

(Laughter)

(Applause.)

You know, oftentimes we have major annual meetings of American institutions in Canada, and it's all about the U.S. I hope that your library situation is better than many places in the U.S. But if it is better, you ought to toot the horn more. Canada does not toot its horn enough and therefore the horn is becoming fainter.

(Applause.)

I know this firsthand because years ago, when I would ask Canadians what are the great achievements of your country, they would have a few sports and a few pharmaceuticals, and then they would say, "Ahh." They wouldn't get past eighteen on the list. And so we did a book called *Canada Firsts* and we sent the manuscript to major publishers in Canada. They said Canada's people would be too modest to buy a book saying they were first in the world. We got a publisher who turned us down, had a second opinion from McClelland and Stewart, and they printed the book and it became a 42-week best seller.

You gave us credit unions, for example. We got a lot of things from you, which is why we have a stake in an independent Canada: so the US can benefit from it.

(Shouts and applause.)

Now, what we are seeing with the libraries now, beleaguered by budget cuts, is very, very tough decisions are being made. You know, what do they do? Do they freeze or reduce librarians' compensation? Do they cut hours? Do they lay off staff? Do they buy fewer books? Do they close more branches? I'm told that there were no branches in American libraries closed in the Depression in the '30s. Culture and decay. Look at the '90s. Do they delay repairs? Don't they put in the carpets that are more than frayed? This is year 2003. This is the richest country in the world. We are always told by the Bushes and the Cheneys: "The richest and most powerful country in the world." We keep saying the most powerful country in the world; what we are really talking about is our military power. We are not talking about a humanitarian power. We are not talking about being the library power in the world. Wouldn't that be nice?

(Applause.)

There are cuts everywhere: there are cuts in food for poor children, there are cuts in

Medicaid in the US, and there are cuts in education budgets and welfare for the poor. I haven't seen many cuts for welfare for the rich. In fact, tax cuts for the wealthy are expanding rapidly. President Bush, with the bill he just signed a few days ago -- the latest tax cut for the wealthy -- is going to save himself \$26,000 on his \$400,000 presidential salary. And Dick Cheney has much more, because he is rich; and Rumsfeld, much more since he is richer. And we asked him, the people will stimulate the economy, the people will go out and invest and spend money. We asked the top multimillionaire officials in the government, part of the corporate government, "How are you going to spend your money?" The press agent for President Bush said, "Well, he will ask the President about how he is going to spend his \$26,000." He ought to give that money to the DC library. That's what he ought to do.

(Applause.)

Because it would make Laura Bush happy.

(Laughter.)

And she has been, in the last year or so, very unhappy with her husband. One of the great untold stories. After all, she did vote for George McGovern, you can't forget that that quickly. But one of the reasons she is upset with George W. Bush, according to his own admission that I caught in one of his abbreviated statements, she is upset with the language he has been using. We are going to "smoke them out." We're gonna' "get them." And he says that she thinks he is talking while he is President as if he is a sheriff in Texas.

(Applause.)

Who says George W. Bush never tells the truth? He is not much of a literate example for our country. Sometimes I wonder what would happen if John Adams and Thomas Jefferson and others, James Madison, were reintroduced to George W. Bush in the White House.

Now, we have the situation where the states are cutting vital services as well. Schools in a lush suburb of Portland, Oregon, said to the school children one day, "It's over." Three weeks ago, or whatever, they shortened the school year because the community did not want to raise its local school taxes. They didn't have enough money to finish. And yet there are a lot of millionaires.

Now, the attack on libraries -- and it's not just neglect, it's that, plus it's attack -- is part of a broader attack on community, on institutions that spell community instead of individuation. Institutions that bind people together in a community, that provide a universal service for the

people in that community, that are supported in a community way, instead of by subscription or by fees, which are spreading in our national parks, and all the other institutions that were once designed to be universally accessible community institutions.

The attack on community comes at a time when one-half of the US government's discretionary budget that sets aside Social Security and those social insurance programs, one-half of the entire US government's expenditures this year will be military and we have no longer any major enemy left in the world.

The budget was designed first and foremost to counter the threat of the Soviet Union. Are we afraid of Muldova, Ukraine, Russia? The Soviet Union was set to defend against China. Hardly a threat to our corporate criminals, like Enron, Tyco, Adelphia, WorldCom, part of the corporate crime wave.

Now, just imagine here, where the states have already closed gaps of \$50 billion and they are going to have to do more than double that next year. What is the first to go? Necessities. Not luxuries. Not corrupt parts of budgets. Not preferential parts of budgets. Necessities, universal services. Those are the first to go. That's when you know we're not living in a democracy. In reality, we are living in a plutocracy, because it isn't the wealthy who have to sacrifice first. They are given tax cuts for the wealthy. Huge, now \$2 trillion worth just in the last two years that were passed in Congress and signed by President Bush.

So, it's the necessities that are the first to be cut. Health, education, libraries, public transit. Or, they have to increase the charges that they impose on their users.

I hate the word "customers." Do you use the word "customers?" No. Customers are for Microsoft and that shrink-wrap license that no one can see, because you have to buy the product before you cut it open, or click before you cut it open. That is another subject. Standard form contracts.

But, to be sure, Laura Bush may have helped persuade her husband to increase federal support for libraries from \$112 million. That would not buy a wing on a B-2 bomber sold at a discount. It used to cost \$2 billion for one. But because it no longer has any strategic use, and because members of Congress are having their campaign coffers greased by the manufacturers of the B-2 bomber, now it's available to the government for a billion dollars. It was designed for the Soviet Union. Now it's being over-used for other expeditions, very expensive to use it for what it's being used for: \$112 million went to \$285 million.

Most of this increase in the federal government's budget for libraries is for training new librarians who will soon find themselves applying for jobs in crumbling libraries or looking for jobs where there are none, a more and more frequent experience for North Americans.

Oakland, California. Every year, Oakland, California, is subsidizing the Oakland football team, the Raiders, according to the Mayor Jerry Brown, who told me this last week, \$20 to \$24 million a year. I asked him, "What is the library budget?" Around \$14 million. This is after the taxpayers built the stadium, got hooked without their acquiescence into a very, very detailed contract, and now the owner of the Oakland Raiders is in his sixth week of a trial where he has sued the City of Oakland for a billion dollars in damages, because Oakland apparently is not guaranteeing his sky boxes when they are empty with taxpayer dollars.

You want to talk about the fall of Rome? What does that say about our society in terms of its priorities? The DC Library System last year spent \$4 per capita on books. In Boston, I hear it's \$11. In Cleveland it's \$21.

What is the difference between the support in St. Louis for its library system and in Washington? What are the variations here that we can learn from? Why is it that some library systems (like the New York Public Library System) were turned around? The leadership of Gregorian and Brooke Astor; what a duo that was. I hear it's falling on hard times again, but it was quite a turnaround. And, what is it? It's enough people in the community who say, "It's going to be done." It's enough people, not only users in the neighborhoods who don't have much means, but people who may not use the branches because they have other specialized libraries or other ways to deal with that, but who feel a community responsibility. For what? Reviving our libraries, especially in our cities, represents educational renewal, civic renewal, and urban renewal all in one.

It brings the neighborhoods of these crumbling inner cities back together again. It's a renaissance. Why don't we see this? Because of massive individuation, greed and loss of nerve in community building. That's why.

We are producing one generation after another that has pronounced incorporation of those disabilities -- the television and video age.

Library budgets have to be hurled against other budgets that are wasteful, corrupt or clearly the product of special privilege. In Washington, DC, the Mayor has had two vision statements for the libraries: 1998, and the year 2002. He forgot them before he read them. He

has done virtually nothing. He is spending a good deal of his time now upping the ante, up to \$328 million, to lure a baseball team to the District of Columbia, with a spanking new taxpayer funded stadium in the District of Columbia, while the libraries, schools, and clinics crumble for lack of repair. How did we end up in such a situation? Day after day, he is in negotiation, he is on the phone. He spends almost no time with the libraries, even though he has a vision statement.

You know why? Because someone is pummeling him on the stadium. It's called developers. It's called bankers. It's called professional ball teams. It's called boosters, who want to turn our national capital into a nation of spectators, instead of readers and activists and participants. A nation of spectators. We sit and look at TV and we look at video games, and we look at palm pilots and we check this on the screen and we watch professional sports and professional opera and symphonies as our local and neighborhood cultures disintegrate and disappear.

We don't have a culture in the United States. We have a corporate commercial culture. Those two adjectives are very necessary. We have an old culture, an old folk culture, receding into the past. That's what's happening to us.

The libraries are a part of a seamless web of corporatization of our society, of the commercialization of our society, of the corporate takeover of budgetary priorities.

So in Washington, whenever I'm interviewed on the DC Library System, I start with the proposed baseball stadium. And I say, "That stadium is never going to be built until that library system is among the best in the nation."

(Applause.)

Let the teams stay in Montreal.

(Applause.)

It's proving that with a small budget, it has one of the best teams. It's sort of counterintuitive. And those of us who look at this situation are very pleased.

(Laughter)

The ball players in Montreal are learning that they have to try harder, like Avis with Hertz and the Rent-a-Car slogan.

Now, I want to say just a few words about our DC Library Renaissance Project, because we need help. Some of you may get some good ideas as well.

First of all, we start with the premise that half of democracy is just showing up. That's all. Just show up. Show up to vote. Show up for City Council meetings. Show up for demonstrations. I think we should all carry a button that says: I show up.

(Laughter)

Showing up stuns politicians, "Hey! These people are serious! They have turned off the second rerun of Cheers and come down to the City Council meeting."

(Laughter)

And essentially, that's what we did. We met with the Mayor and we wanted him to add \$3 million to the DC library budget. That would have taken it up to maybe 1 percent instead of 1.4 percent, which it was in the '70s. So what do we do, we bated our breath and we get the budget and he cuts \$4 million of the capital budget to renovate four branches, cuts another million from the operating budget and in effect says to us, "Take that!"

Well, there is nothing more motivating!

(Laughter.)

So together with the people at the DC library headquarters, and the branches, we filled the hearing room for the DC City Council, which had the authority to rearrange the budget and give more money to the DC system. This is where the papers are full every day of \$6 million wasted here, \$15 million wasted here, \$24 million looted here. I mean, they can't find the money? It's like fishing off the Grand Banks of New Finland in 1800. They can't find the money? You don't have to take it from clinics serving poor children.

So here was the auspicious day for a show of civic commitment and force to the DC City Council. It was the first day of the war in Iraq, the invasion. Well, that is a good way to turn things out, especially since our leaders had scared the dickens out of the people in DC by calling us Ground Zero. And then it was pouring rain. But the whole room was jam-packed with very boisterous people from all over the district. It wasn't just from one part. The City Council was so impressed. There were 39 witnesses. It should have been on TV, replacing the weather report.

(Laughter.)

It didn't get on TV at all that night. It will be looked at as a seminal episode in the history of the DC Library System.

There was a 12-year-old girl who came and testified as to what the library branch meant

to her. And her last words were, "I want to thank you for letting me speak today, because it's the first time I've done anything for my country." She had redefined patriotism. Not just missiles, nuclear subs with multiple warheads, marching bands. Libraries.

And there was a 42-year-old man who was illiterate and became literate and read his testimony with a slight degree of haltingness as he proudly moved from one sentence to another. He was defining liberation. He became a small businessman. He was successful.

Then there was the head of the ALA, and there were others who were testifying for libraries, people who worked in libraries. But it was really the users of the library that I think carried the day with the City Council. What did they do? They restored the \$4 million in capital improvement budgets, restored the \$1 million cut in the operating budget, and they added a half million dollars on top of it for the operating budget.

(Applause.)

Now, for this, we were supposed to be proud? In other words, we are back even with \$500,000. You see how they control the expectation level? So we are just getting started.

All of this was done basically without the involved leadership of the churches, the business community, the law firms or the trade unions. So, in other words, we just scratched the surface of support for the libraries, which is another way of conveying to you that maybe you've just scratched the surface of support that lies latent.

Have you ever met anybody over forty who hasn't told you about his or her library experience? They have all had library experiences, very, very positive ones. They have had galvanizing ones. A marker in their growth. And there are now thousands of young children in one city after another growing up without a library experience. That is certainly true of Washington, DC.

At our opening dinner announcing the DC Library Renaissance Project, we had commissioned a photographer to go to all the branches and take pictures, because you could not do justice to the needs that were neglected with mere words. We mounted all the pictures in a foyer. It was actually in the Carnegie building. That is sort of ironic. It was in the Carnegie building in Washington, DC.

The pictures were staggering. One was a picture of a reading room at a branch through a bullet hole that had been there for two years. Another was a picture next to a crumbling theater that had closed down and was a drug den. That's a nice atmosphere to bring your little kids.

Sidestep this one....

Another one was a picture of our flag tattered over a branch, absolutely in tatters. I was trying to figure out what is the subtitle for the photograph? It immediately came to me, and it wasn't just figurative: "And our flag was still there..." It's like a war zone. Well, that flag got replaced very quickly.

So, the amount of support for libraries is in direct proportion of the following initiatives. One, where you really fight for those libraries; not just plead. Fight. There is a difference. You can include pleading in the fight. When you plead, when you plead in that forlorn tone of a beleaguered librarian, you are signaling weakness from a political power point of view.

You have to fight for the libraries. Show all the services that could be and that are part of the library systems. And then you go out and you'll see enormous latent support come to the surface. We have a major corporate law firm, Hogan & Hartson, doing all sorts of pro bono work for us, looking at the DC Library Foundation, city government, how grants can and cannot be transmitted. It is a miasma of complexity. They are doing it. This is a corporate law firm. You know corporate law firms. They do other things.

We want to get other corporate law firms involved. We want to get the universities in DC involved. There are all kinds of entities that can help you, all kinds of people who have time on their hands. There are retired foreign-service people, for example, in Washington we are getting in touch with. I mean all kinds. It's there. You have to believe it's there.

The other problem you confront is: Libraries? Why do we need libraries? We have computers. We have the Internet. One time I was flying east from Seattle. Right next to me was the Vice President of Microsoft. And he had in his hand, this was 3 years ago, this little gizmo. And he said, "500 books here, and it's going to be 5 million in ten years. What book do you want?" He gave me the list. There it is. It came out there, it was pretty clear. And he said, "It's just beginning. You'll get book reviews, footnotes." Wonderful. And I said, "Gee, does this gizmo hug you? Does this gizmo produce a two-way or three-way conversation between human beings? Does this gizmo tell you how you can become a civic activist to destroy the monopoly known as Microsoft?"

(Applause and cheers.)

The differences between the computer Internet information age and a library is massive and personal. It's the difference between living in virtual reality and reality. Half of the time of

our children now is in virtual reality. That's one reason why they are not socialized. Their vocabulary is minimal. They're pushing buttons.

Why is the library different? Because a library is where you can go and meet people. You can go and socialize. You can go as a youngster and have help with your homework. You can go and ask for advice about how to buy insurance or how to shop for credit. You can go as a community group and have a meeting there. There are so few public places anymore. You can go and connect with some of the literary talent and the artistic talent. In short, it's all the difference in the world. And yet, I've met too many librarians who were extremely defensive about the computer age replacing them. If anything, the library becomes a sanctuary of necessity from the computer age. That's what it becomes.

(Applause.)

Just to have a place where there's peace and quiet, where you don't have sirens and jet planes and TV on and videos and so forth. The cacophony of noise is overwhelming, damaging hearing aids and acuity.

Now, I'm sure some of you are saying, "Our libraries are noisy, too." Let me end on this note. There's so much more to say, but the proposals I've just suggested, and many of you have the same proposals, need to be connected in an operating dynamic. So I'm serious when I say, if you are interested in experimenting in consumer skill seminars or civic skill seminars, we really stand ready, willing and able to give you all kinds of help and leads.

I also want to note that the plight of the library is a function of too much concentration of power and wealth in too few hands. We are a country -- we are a continent --

(Applause.)

We are a continent where there is massive private wealth and public squalor. A Canadian, John Kenneth Galbraith, once pointed this out in a book in the late 1950s. He called it *The Affluent Society*. Private affluence and public squalor is becoming more and more pronounced, year by year.

The question is how do you retain the public library as a public responsibility with its legitimate claim on the city and state budgets and still raise private money in a way where the city fathers do not tell you, "Well, you raised \$4 million, now raise \$8 million," and slowly move it into a privatized mode?

How do you have private funds being a supplement for various events and things that you

don't think can be immediately publicly funded?

Well, I would suggest that if your town or city is suitable for it, you hold an annual library parade. Parades are underestimated spectacles. You can always get high school bands. You can get permits. I grew up in a town that is perfect for parades, it's 11,000 people: Winstead, Connecticut. 11,000 people and the Main Street is a mile long. Perfect for parades. It brings people out from all the neighborhoods and the residents. And as you march through your town, you can pass out all kinds of things and collect all kinds of ideas and support.

Another idea is to look into the concept of the checkoff. For example, some towns have checkoffs for certain causes on property tax returns or other tax refund returns. Think about the checkoff. Think about refunds being allocated at the option of the customer. If consumers get tax refunds, there should be an option. They don't want \$7.50 back or \$8. Have a little checkoff, "I want this to go to our local library."

There are other ideas that can be developed, but nothing is going to substitute for the dynamic elaboration of the multiple functions of the library in 21st century North America. That's why we want to keep in touch with you. With me from Washington is Leonard Minsky, who was a professor of English at Simon Fraser. He will be out there at the table where the signup sheets are and where your cards are.

I want to thank you very much for your support. Give us all the ideas that you can and we will try to reciprocate, so that five or ten years from now we will see a real expansion of what libraries mean to a civilization that increasingly has been commercialized in such a way as to turn its back on these libraries.

(Applause.)

Thank you very much. If you go to the microphones, we can have a good discussion.

And I want to thank Pat Graves for her lightning transmission of words into print.

(Applause.)

Anybody want to start?

>> AUDIENCE: Would you comment on the role that Congress fails to play in the governance of the District and the budget and so forth?

>> RALPH NADER: I missed the first part of the question on the PA.

>> AUDIENCE: I was being tactful. I asked if you would comment on the role that the Congress plays in funding the District of Columbia or failing to fund it.

>> RALPH NADER: Yes. All the budget ends up in front of Congress for approval. We are now going to the Congress to add more funds to what the DC City Council restored.

The DC -- the District of Columbia -- is a colony. It does not have voting representatives in the Congress. It has a nonvoting representative in the House of Representatives. And it's the only federal district in any country in the world that prevents its citizens from having the vote. We can vote for President but not for members of Congress. The only one in the world. So there is a DC statehood movement and there is a DC "alternative to the statehood" movement, where they would have voting representatives, even though they wouldn't be a state.

But oftentimes the district will have a referendum. It will approve something and then Congress will, in effect, throw it aside. So, it's really amazing that Bush keeps talking about exporting democracy to Iraq, and he doesn't have democracy where he is living in the White House, rent free.

(Applause.)

On this side?

>> AUDIENCE: I have a question. I really enjoyed your speech and I agreed with you on many points. But one of your comments has been bothering me for the past probably half an hour. You spoke about our culture of spectators when you were talking about the major league baseball teams, and you included professional orchestras as equivalent to pro baseball. I don't see it that way and I was surprised that you did.

I'd like you to clarify what the difference is between the written word in a book, which we should be preserving, and some of the other materials that we have in our public libraries and school libraries and academic libraries across the country. One of the things that I as a teen librarian always try to do is to get my teens active in all sorts of different forms of self-expression. That's a form of citizenship as well.

Could you tell me what the difference between being an author and being a composer is?

>> RALPH NADER: Yes. I was talking about watching them on TV.

>> AUDIENCE: Which is something that people can't afford. I can't afford to see the opera.

>> RALPH NADER: That's the point I was making. While we can't deny people coming together with superior excellence beyond those of us mere mortals and playing musical instruments, or a ballet, we should also recognize that there is something unhealthy about, a.)

only rich people being able to afford the tickets, and, b.) even if they could afford the tickets, not developing their own local opera and local symphony. Local, local, local.

(Applause.)

So, instead of millions of people watching a few hundreds of people, we'd have thousands of people performing those cultural activities. So, one is watching TV, one is the high price. And the other is, even if it was like the Roman circus, where they let you in free -- at least let's say it was affordable, as it was in the Soviet Union -- that was one of the few things that was affordable in the Soviet Union -- it's just not good. When you go through towns where people either spend their time watching the superstars on TV, or passing through the city, and they don't think of themselves performing in an organized way, so that every community has these cultural organizations, that's not healthy. I submit that's also not a good farm team approach.

You're not going to get the greats coming forward from all over the country, unless they go to the Julliard school or some more professional training school.

Does that respond?

>> AUDIENCE: A little bit. But I'm not sure that -- I mean, I know that you've got the baseball analogy going on. But as somebody who participated heavily in community orchestras as a child and as an adult, I think that those really high quality organizations do need funding to survive. A lot of professional orchestras in this country don't sell enough tickets or -- they need to do fundraisings. This kind of thing is not on the same level as professional basketball. I don't think you're getting my point.

>> RALPH NADER: No. That is quite true. You're using the word I'm really referring to. It's community culture. Community orchestras. Yes.

But we live in a winner-take-all society. The best athletes, the best doctors, best lawyers, quote, come off with the lion's share. I can see lots of people, young children, saying, "Well, I can never be as good" as someone they watch on TV or in a spectacular Radio City Hall performance. But they can be that good in their community.

We want to be careful that we don't have a winner-take-all getting the lion's share of the money, and a winner-take-all demoralizing people. I think they are just not up to it.

We don't want the equivalent of the SAT test. It's a multiple choice test that doesn't test the important ingredients that spell success in life, but it's interpreted as if it's the gate opener or gate closer for people who want to go to college and graduate school and become members of

trades and professions. They all have to go through those tests.

Well, those tests don't test your judgment, experience, wisdom, creativity, idealism, stamina, diligence, determination, all the things that spell success.

(Applause.)

They don't.

This is a subject for another time. But the demoralization factor of the superstars is not healthy.

Yes?

>> AUDIENCE: Thank you very much for your speech. It was really good and very inspiring. The recent FCC ruling increases the tendency towards the conglomeration of the media. Why should this concern us as librarians, and why is it of concern to libraries? Could you discuss this a bit?

>> RALPH NADER: Well, the concentration in the last ten years has been beyond spectacular. Ten years ago, no radio company could own more than 15, 20 stations. Now, Clear Channel owns 1250 stations and growing. They also own a lot of the theaters around the country. So, they can decide what musicians are going to be heard by whom. Quite apart from the old payola with the DJs, now it can be decided in a more sophisticated way at the management level. It just happens that Clear Channel, which was underway in 1996 or so, is a very right-wing run management. They actually financed a rally recently in Atlanta, pushing for war in Iraq, behind Bush.

This is unheard of -- radio stations doing something like this. They are supposed to have a license, they are supposed to be pursuing the standard in the 1934 Communications Act, which is public convenience, interest and necessity. So we go from the early days of radio, in the '20s, when Hoover is Secretary of Commerce before he was President and thought that radio stations had to be a public trust, they had to be educational in purpose and they had to allow no advertising.

Can you imagine? The early debate was between the commercial people who wanted to commercialize radio and the people who wanted no advertising, educational public trust, let many voices speak. Now, how does this affect everybody? It affects people -- I mean, if you've got conglomeratized media, are you going to have time allocated to discussing books on radio and TV? The question answers itself. Are you going to have a high focus on sensational,

violent, sexual, addictive news? Well, that knocks out libraries. Libraries aren't news on local radio and TV. Just phone up your local news radio shows station and say, "Why don't you have the director of your town's library on?" I mean, you'd hear a click.

(Laughter)

So because they become more frenzied, it becomes the lowest common denominator of mass merchandising.

Now, presumably librarians can get their views across on some community radio, which are very few. One nice one is in Tampa, Florida, which shows what can be done if a community gets together.

Or public radio. But increasingly public radio is veering toward a commercial model. Not just in having more ads, but now they have news, weather and sports and they keep telling you the traffic, which tells you they are engaging in a bit of protective imitation, which is a bit removed from the original inspiration for public radio.

And then, finally, the terribly sensual addiction that media induces on the part of younger generations makes it far less likely that they would be interested in reading and thinking and going to the library and going to events. You know, the most sensual institution in the history of the world is the modern multinational corporation. I'm not just talking about sound and light. I'm talking about packaging. I'm talking about sexual innuendos or explications. I'm talking about the way they induce addictions. Just watching becomes an addiction. Never mind what they are selling: junk food, fat and sugar pumps into the stomachs of our children, glorifying other products, liquor, and, until the last 20, 25 years, tobacco.

So there are a lot of connections there. You know, culture is a seamless web. If you have one value system in control, then the civic values are going to suffer. The real great conflict in our country today is between commercial values and civic value, and guess who is winning? The universities are being corporatized, our elections are commercialized. Campaign money. Our government is being commercialized. Childhood itself is commercialized. Massive selling direct to 6, 7, 8, 9-year-olds, bypassing parents. It's extremely premeditated, precise, the latest applied psychological sciences.

Libraries representing civic values represent a vanguard in the reassertion, so that commercial value will forever be subjugated to civic values. When we abolished child labor 100 years ago, we told the industry factories, "You are not going to hire 10-year-olds. They should

be going to school instead of working in dungeon factories. You'll have to pay a little more and hire adults." That's the subordination of commercial values to civic values. And guess what? When commercial values are read the riot act by civic values, whether it's consumer safety, environmental advance, labor standards, when it is read the riot act by a firm regime of law and order, it is so expedient and so opportunistic, it will adapt and abide by those civic values.

I saw that in my struggle with the auto industry. They fought like the dickens against seat belts and air bags and other devices. And after they were forced to put them in their cars, I would turn on the late evening news, and the auto companies would be bragging about this. "We're fully equipped with three-point seat belts." Later on they would brag about air bags. The one virtue of corporatism is that it has no convictions.

(Applause.)

It's very expedient and its very expediency leads us to have confidence that it will adapt if it's confronted with a serious reassertion of civic values.

Yes?

>> AUDIENCE: I liked what you said about the local level and building energy. But I have a bit of problem with the idea of fundraising with libraries, which is being done primarily on a local level. It makes for some well-established libraries in one section and maybe not in another. It's quite irregular across the country. I guess the point I want to make primarily is that libraries, to me, are a very important national institution. The more you can do to build on national support for it, I think the better it is. I would like to see libraries, like healthcare, built in as a necessity of living and to have the government money to support that.

A real trend is to build on private monies, because government money has been so slashed. What I find changed in the libraries over the years is that libraries constantly have to stroke corporate egos to make them attractive for fundraising. I've seen so many changes in the library. They have become less radical, I find, more careful. It's no longer a place you can go to find anything. The collections are becoming more select.

>> RALPH NADER: Yes.

>> AUDIENCE: I don't know that it's okay to go for any private monies because there is too much attached to it. Why not put all that energy into public monies and redefining the value of public need, rather than put that energy into private places?

(Applause.)

>> RALPH NADER: Yes. You shame me. I couldn't have put it better myself, and I didn't.

There has to be a national library policy here and not just local or state. It's got to be national. Why do we have a national government? They can hit a tiny spot 4,000 miles away with a missile that would provide a major boost for the nation's library budget in terms of what it costs and what its delivery system costs. Why don't we do something like this: why don't we say we want the national government to fund the public libraries in America at the level of the most expensive single weapon system? How is that?

(Applause.)

>> AUDIENCE: Yes!

>> RALPH NADER: You know, just to catch the ear of the late evening news. What would it be today? It would be a \$4 billion aircraft carrier, a \$2 billion nuclear powered submarine with multiple warheads that can destroy 150 cities in the world -- one sub, like that. Or it would be a \$2 billion B-2 bomber. Well, compare that with \$110 million federal contributions to public libraries this year.

You know how the word "insane" is often related only to individuals? It's time for us to clinically analyze our institutions by conventional standards of insanity. That's the way they are operating.

(Applause.)

The society can hit a spot thousands of miles away accurately with a missile, but they can't provide the elderly with an effective affordable hearing aid.

(Applause.)

\$2,000 for a hearing aid doesn't work. Our priorities are completely inverted. And, you know, that's what the libraries are there for.

Now, on the censorship issue, that is a definite problem. Sometimes when you raise private money it goes to the more affluent branches and that's where a lot of the bequests go. A person dies, has a bequest going to the branch for 40, 50 years, it's just a natural thing. But in the poorer areas, you don't have that. So, that tends to skew it, unless there is a rule that it's spread out. Then you deal with the testator, disregarding the testator's intent. Anything that corporate charity institutionalizes, they want to have a say. It would not be good if they started frowning on certain books being prominently displayed in libraries. You've already seen that in

schools, where you have channel 1 and you have Adopt-a-school corporate programs. You know, pretty soon one step goes to another, and, before you know it, you've got the cloud of censorship hovering over the school or the library. That's why [Vartan] Gregorian told me when we started the project, he said, "I want to tell you one thing: No matter how much private money can be raised, make sure that you always say the DC Library System is a public tax-supported institution, first and foremost."

(Applause.)

>> AUDIENCE: As bad as the system is in DC, I think it's more dismal throughout the developing countries. Developing countries have difficult times getting textbooks, scientific materials and literacy materials because of the international obligation under the expanding trade regime that they find themselves under. Global Watch has done a good job of calling this problem to the public's attention in the area of patented medicines. I'm hoping that the library associations that are working on these issues and Global Trade Watch will be able to work more closely on textual issues such as the copyright and trade agreements. I wonder if you had thoughts on that.

>> RALPH NADER: There are a couple of websites. One is called cptech.org: consumer project on technology. For Global Trade Watch, log into citizen.org and you'll get the elaboration of what the gentleman was referring to. It really is truly awe-inspiring to see all the things that you have to deal with now that you didn't have to deal with thirty years ago. One of them is this subject, in addition to computers, in addition to budget cuts and so forth.

But that's going to come to a head, and one good argument to keep in mind is the following: That under the guise of free trade, companies are trying to spread their twenty-year monopoly patent and their copyright extensions all over the world. While there are certain valid reasons for patents and copyrights, there may not be valid reasons for that length of term. There may be alternatives that fulfill the same purpose, especially in the patent area for drug companies.

But by definition, these are anti-free trade, some for good reason. But they can be expanded and become very restrictive and monopolistic. That's what you were referring to.

Again, let's have your cards and you've got to keep in touch.

(Applause.)

Remember one thing: if any of you know an Internet program that has reduced illiteracy,

let me know. See if you can reduce illiteracy without having the figurative arm around the shoulder among a group of people, especially adult illiteracy. Thank you.

(Applause.)

>> PRES. MAURICE FREEDMAN: Thanks to Ralph Nader. That last question was a great segue to Tuesday morning, when Naomi Klein is speaking on the subject of globalization and what is going on with conglomerates. Please come. 8 a.m. Tuesday morning.

Thanks for coming. Good-bye.

(End of session.)

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