President-Elect Report
American Library Association (ALA)
6 June 2025

As President-Elect of the American Library Association (ALA), I had the profound privilege of supporting historic work at an extraordinary time for our profession. Library workers across the nation are navigating challenges that strike at the very core of our values—intellectual freedom, equitable access, public trust, and community care as well as engaging the public to actively support the future of American libraries.

In the face of book bans, legislative threats, the erosion of funding and foundational institutions that steward and structure our work at an international scale, and coordinated attacks on our profession, ALA remains a vital force for advocacy, leadership, and resilience. I am honored to contribute to this mission through meaningful engagement with members, governance, partners, and communities across the globe.

The following outlines my recent activities in support of our association's strategic priorities and shared commitments, including stewardship of the association's leadership transition, support for librarianship, and the advancement of broader public collaboration and solidarity with our profession.

Key Activities and Responsibilities

Strategic Engagement and Advocacy

Over the past months, I have represented ALA across diverse settings, forging connections, celebrating innovation, and advocating on behalf of library workers in the U.S. and around the world.

- Supported ALA Executive Board work in strategic planning, candidate interviews for Executive Director, and onboarding of incoming board members at the 2025 Spring Meeting in Chicago.
- Toured school libraries in Atlanta at the invitation of local educators, following their engagement with the ALA LLX edition of the *School Librarians United* podcast. During the visit, I led a legislative advocacy workshop supporting school librarianship, expanding on my work in Iowa, where recent efforts helped secure a second injunction preserving access to diverse materials in school libraries.
- Keynoted the 2025 pinning ceremony for the University of Iowa School of Library and Information Science graduating class (remarks attached).
- Toured the Library of Congress with Deputy Director Robert Newlen.
- Co-authoring a Tribute Resolution for ALA Council to honor the work of Dr. Carla Hayden.
- Visited the school library of former ALA Board Member Eboni Henry and met her second-grade class, who co-authored a delightful story about an astronaut kitten with me.
- Spoke at the Toronto Arts Festival on the intersection of libraries, creativity, and civic life.
- Delivered a joint keynote with Amanda Jones at the 70th Congress of the France Library Association, discussing global challenges and triumphs in the fight for intellectual freedom and access to information.
- Toured the American Library in Paris with Past Treasurer and ALA Executive Board Member Maggie Farrell, engaging in dialogue around international partnerships and community resilience.

- Joined Dutch library leaders in Amsterdam for discussions on multilingual collections, sustainable infrastructure, and evolving trends in public engagement.

Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges:

- The critical need to review the financial health of our Association and to implement sustainability practices that reflect our environment as well as model responsible fiscal stewardship to libraries around the nation facing similar circumstances.
- Ongoing advocacy in response to the U.S. President's "skinny budget," which eliminates all funding for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), requiring urgent mobilization to protect federal library support.
- The continued need for rapid-response engagement in the face of censorship, legislative hostility, and emergent community crises.

Opportunities:

- Supporting the onboarding of six new Executive Board members, fostering inclusive collaboration and deepening their engagement in ALA governance.
- Leveraging the creativity of the Presidential Advisory Committee, ALA Council, and member networks to pursue mission-aligned work with passion and ingenuity.
- Engaging in conversations around artificial intelligence that center equity, ethical implementation, patron privacy, and intellectual freedom.
- Advocating for copyright frameworks that ensure fair use, open access, and robust support for learners and libraries in a rapidly digitizing information landscape.
- Designing a cost-neutral Presidential Inauguration that remains celebratory, community-centered, and aligned with our shared values.
- Advancing inclusive and transparent leadership by making thoughtful appointments, collaborating closely with the Committee on Committees, and expanding intentional outreach to ensure meaningful representation and sustained member engagement.

Conclusion

As I offer this final report in my role as President-Elect, I do so with a deep sense of purpose and a renewed energy to lead—this time in a new capacity, but with the same enduring commitment to our members and mission. Leadership is not simply about direction; it is about amplification. It is about lifting up the voices around us and empowering each person to answer the shared charge before us.

The lessons and strategies I've gained in this role will continue to shape my approach in the months ahead. I am especially grateful to President Hohl for their steadfast mentorship, and to the Executive Board for your partnership, resolve, and wisdom. To our outgoing colleagues, thank you for your clarity, courage, and care. To our incoming leaders, welcome—your perspective is not only needed but vital.

To the incredible ALA staff and member leaders across every division, round table, and committee: thank you. Together, we are building a future rooted in access, advocacy, and possibility—and I am honored to continue this work with you.

In appreciation, solidarity, and hope,
Sam Helmick

Honoring Legacy, Shaping the Future: A Call to Leadership in Libraries
Speech for the University of Iowa School of Library and Information Science Pinning Ceremony – 14 May 2025

Good Evening, esteemed faculty, graduates, families, and friends,

It is both an honor and a privilege to stand with you tonight as a fellow practitioner and 2025/2026 President of the American Library Association.

Tonight, we celebrate your academic accomplishments, but also the important role you are about to assume as guardians of information, champions of equity, and stewards of democracy.

As you receive your pins, please remember that they signify more than the successful completion of your studies. They represent your commitment to the values that are the bedrock of our profession—values that have never been more vital than they are today.

These values—adopted and upheld by the American Library Association—and practiced in libraries around the globe include:

Access: Ensuring that everyone can freely seek and receive information without obstacle or impediment.

Equity: Working to remove systemic barriers so that all people can engage fully and fairly with library resources.

Intellectual Freedom and Privacy: Defending the right to read, to think, to speak, and to seek knowledge without surveillance or censorship.

Public Good: Promoting libraries as essential civic institutions that support education, literacy, and democracy.

Sustainability: Making choices that support the long-term health of our communities and planet.

Access, Equity, Intellectual Freedom and Privacy, Public Good, and Sustainability: these are not abstract ideals. They are our daily commitments.

They are the lens through which we make decisions, the compass by which we guide our work.

And these values have borne profound impact both in America and around the world.

There are an estimated 124,903 public, private, school, corporate, government, and special libraries in the United States today, serving as lifelines to their communities.

Libraries are increasingly responsible for the provision of services ranging from literacy to legal help, from job searches to community resilience in face of crisis. In fact, libraries collectively receive nearly 1.5 billion visits annually—more than the total attendance at all major sporting events and theme parks combined.

Globally, librarians are on the front lines of change—digitizing endangered manuscripts, connecting rural communities to the internet, and protecting intellectual freedom.

In Colombia, mobile libraries travel by donkey to reach children in remote villages. In South Korea, libraries have evolved into 24-hour cultural centers. In Finland, one of the most literate countries in the world, libraries loan not only books but also tools, art, and musical instruments.

Across continents and cultures, these institutions are united by a shared belief: that access to knowledge is a human right.

When international visitors step into the Iowa City Public Library, they often express amazement at what they find—free access to books, resources, space, and support without barriers. They see, in our libraries, some of the very best of what this nation aspires to be: welcoming, equitable, democratic, and open to all.
Our libraries stand as living testaments to those ideals. They reflect the radical notion that everyone—regardless of background, income, or belief—deserves access to opportunity.

The University of Iowa's School of Library and Information Science has a proud history of leadership and excellence when it comes to inculcating and operating within these values. Accredited by the American Library Association since 1971, this institution has prepared generations of librarians and information professionals to meet the evolving needs of our communities with thoughtfulness, creativity, and integrity.

This school is not just a place of learning—it is a *place of legacy*.

A legacy created by award-winning faculty, high-achieving alumni, a dedicated, and a compassionate student body, as well as groundbreaking research ranging from culturally responsive curation of data to the installation of social workers in public libraries.

The State of Iowa is not only "fields of opportunity" —it carries history which bends toward social justice.
In 1868, Susan Clark, a 13-year-old African American girl, was denied admission to her local school based solely on race. Her father, Alexander Clark—a barber, civil rights activist, and later U.S. ambassador to Liberia—challenged that injustice in court and won.

The court ruled that segregated public schools violated the Iowa Constitution. That landmark decision by the Iowa Supreme Court in the case of *Clark v. Board of Directors of the City of Muscatine* came 86 years before the U.S. Supreme Court made its historic decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954.

Incidentally, Alexander Clark's son, Alexander G. Clark Jr., was the first Black graduate to earn a law degree from the College of Iowa City—now part of the University of Iowa—in 1879.

And in 1938, Des Moines Public Library Director, Forest Spaulding, informed and guided by the valiant efforts of those before him, drafted the Library Bill of Rights—his visionary response to the rising tide of censorship, and our timeless defense of intellectual freedom. Spaulding's words became the ethical backbone of our profession, adopted by the American Library Association just a year later.

The Library Bill of Rights purports that:

"Libraries are an American institution and must provide, without discrimination, a broad range of materials, sources, and information that reflect the diverse needs of our communities. Libraries must protect the confidentiality of individuals and their library records and uphold intellectual freedom by resisting censorship and pressure to exclude materials."

This foundational document is not just a declaration of rights. It is a call to action, a statement of who we are as librarians, and what we are committed to defending in every library, every day.

As Toni Morrison once said: “Access to knowledge is the superb, the supreme act of truly great civilizations. Of all the institutions that purport to do this, free libraries stand virtually alone in accomplishing this mission.”

That mission continues with each of you. Today, you join that legacy. But you also inherit a challenge.

Across the country, libraries are under pressure. Book challenges are rising. Access to accurate information is under attack. Misinformation is spreading, and trust in institutions is being tested.

In this climate, let me say clearly: the work of librarians is not neutral. It is necessary.

You are not simply managers of books and databases. You are protectors of truth. You are educators.

Advocates. Innovators. Bridge builders. And in many communities, you are a lifeline.
You are being called to serve—but also to lead.

So let us lead . . . by welcoming all who encounter the library—holding space for their entry into the world of knowledge, curiosity, and civic participation.

Let us honor each person's journey into literacy, learning, and belonging.

Let us engage in open, good faith conversations about our work—meeting concerns not with defensiveness, but with clarity, professionalism, and compassion. May we respond with resilience, informed by our values, ready to elucidate our thoughtful, inclusive, and evidence-based practices.

Let us champion libraries by sharing our stories—of transformation, of community, of joy—and encouraging library users, allies, and advocates around the world to do the same. Because our stories are worth sharing, our stories shape understanding, and understanding builds trust and support.

Let us be brave enough to listen. Bold enough to speak. And wise enough to keep growing alongside the communities we serve.

So this evening, as you wear your pin, wear it with pride—but also with purpose.

Let it remind you of those Iowans, . . . of those readers, and students, and welcomers and thought partners and includers, and community architects, and information access activists who came before us—who inform, influence, and inspire us—of Forest Spaulding, of Susan Clark and Alexander Clark—individuals who stood firmly for access, freedom, and justice.

Let it remind you that the futures for libraries, information, and education are not things we observe—they are opportunities we are responsible to shape.

Congratulations, Class of 2025.

The world needs what you bring. And we are so grateful that you are stepping forward to lead us into the future.

Thank you.