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Oklahoma Report  
Mountain Plains Library Association  
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The state of Oklahoma is experiencing the double whammy of economic downturn coupled with income tax cuts. Our state budget projected shortfall is 1.2 billion, which puts us this year as the state with the highest shortfall, percentage-wise. Although our state has traditionally seen higher revenues from natural gas and petroleum, these revenues cannot offset the loss of income from the erosion of tax revenues. There is a rainy day fund, which is not sufficient to meet the projected shortfalls of this and the next few years.

The Oklahoma State Legislature is considering lots of unpopular and difficult reductions in services. Most if not all state agencies will undergo funding cuts.

The Oklahoma Department of Libraries has valiantly struggled to survive to current fiscal crisis. Over the last decade, the Oklahoma Department of Libraries has not been able to fill positions because of budget constraints and continues to cut wherever possible. However, if the Department of Libraries is cut any further, there is a good possibility they can no longer meet the requirements for federal matching grants that benefit libraries all over the state.

In addition, there are several bills pending that allow school districts to be exempt from certain state standards. Most of these bills remove the school library mandates so that schools would not be required to have certified school librarians, library staffing based on school enrollment, nor a library budget for materials. In addition, schools would not be required to meet class size or buy textbooks. Further drastic measures are proposed in other bills under consideration. Some of these are temporary mandates, and some are permanent. The Oklahoma State Legislature will decide on these bills in May. Our state schools are suffering from declining revenues and removing mandates would give schools the opportunity to allocate school library funds and staff elsewhere.

Librarians in Oklahoma are working to educate state legislators on the short sighted wisdom of cutting libraries and services in a time when libraries are so vitally needed. However, this is a time when severe budget cuts must be made.

Several Mountain Plains Library Association member states have been struggling with similar issues and have seen drastic cuts to library services. Perhaps MPLA is more important than ever as we all compare notes on ways to bring needed library services to our customers in this fiscal climate.

