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## SPOKANE MAYOR MARY VERNER JOINS EFFORT TO SAVE SCHOOL LIBRARIES

SPOKANE, WA - Spokane Mayor Mary Verner has declared her support for school libraries and has joined The Washington Coalition for School Libraries and Information Technology (WCSLit), a state-wide coalition comprised of concerned parents, educators, businesses, and community groups who are working to ensure that school libraries receive adequate and sustained funding for full-time certified teacher-librarians, materials, technologies and facilities. The Coalition was formed in November 2007 by a group of Spokane parents concerned about continued cuts to the library programs in their children's elementary schools.

Mayor Verner is the first elected official to formally join the WCSLit and take the lead in supporting school library programs. In a letter to WCSLit members, Mayor Verner speaks to the importance of strong school libraries, "Today's students absolutely must be achievers in reading, communication, research and information technology. Without thriving school libraries, students lack access to the basic tools for success in the 21st Century!"

Spokane Mayor Mary Verner has enthusiastically embraced the WCSLit 2008 legislative agenda, and will be asking the Spokane City Council to add WCSLit's agenda to the city's formally-adopted legislative priorities.

"We are thrilled that Spokane's mayor has come forward to voice her support for school library programs in our state," said WCSLit Co-Chair Susan McBurney. "The coalition is dedicated to ensuring that all students from across the state have the same access to technology, the same chance for literacy, and the same opportunity to receive a world-class education. In joining the coalition, Mayor Verner is showing tremendous leadership, as well as a deep commitment to providing the best education possible for our children. We thank Mayor Verner for her support, and urge other leaders from around the state to join her in supporting Washington school library programs."

Coalition leaders launched an online petition in mid November to see if citizens across the state were concerned about the erosion of school library programs. In just over six weeks, more than 3000 residents, from over 200 towns, have signed the petition, calling upon Washington State Legislators, Governor Gregoire, and the members of the Joint Task Force on Basic Education Finance to ensure that Washington students have full-time access to school libraries and a certified teacher librarian to provide a competitive education in information technology and literacy.

Because the Washington State budget has never had a line-item for school library media programs, individual school districts have had to rely on local money. In the face of budget constraints and state education funding deficits, districts across the state have cut funding for teacher librarians, and in doing so have seriously weakened many school library programs.

The Coalition's top legislative priorities for the 2008 session are to support a bill that creates a line item for school library programs in the 2008 supplemental budget; and to ensure that the Joint Task Force on Basic Education Finance includes school library programs in the definition of basic education and as part of the recommended funding formula in their final report, to be issued in September of 2008.

WCSLit will be hosting a Washington School Library Media Program Summit on February 1<sup>st</sup> in Olympia. The summit will bring together key stakeholders in Washington State K-12 education to address the crisis in education in the state, vis-à-vis school library media programs, through supporting bills in the Washington State Legislature intended to provide baseline funding for school library media programs. The morning session will be a substantive policy discussion amongst regional and national experts who will work to identify a clear vision for library media programs to be fully integrated in K-12 teaching and learning in Washington State. Also, a national-level action plan will be developed. The second half of the summit will be a showcase for state legislators, highlighting why it is important for the state to fund library media programs.

The Coalition counts among its Charter Members leaders in education and business, including:

- Dr. Michael Eisenberg, Founding Dean of the Information School at the UW
- Jan Walsh, Washington State Librarian, Office of the Secretary of State
- Dr. Gene Sharratt, Director of WSU's Superintendent Certification Program
- Don Barbieri, Chairman of the Board, Red Lion Corporation

Coalition Partners from across the state include:

- Washington Library Media Association (WLMA)
- Washington State Parent Teacher Association (WSPTA)
- Washington Library Association (WLA)

Over twenty towns across the state have established WCSLit chapters. In addition, national organizations have signed on as supporters of the coalition's efforts, including the American Library Association (ALA) and the American Association of School Librarians (AASL).

For more information on the Washington Coalition for School Libraries and Information Technology (WCSLit), please visit the website: [www.fundourfuturewashington.org](http://www.fundourfuturewashington.org). To access the petition, please go to <http://gopetition.com/online/15285.html>

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