

To the Editor:

Public libraries are making headlines nationwide and have become an unexpected target of efforts to limit individual rights, freedom of speech and critical thinking. Nationwide, Minnesota has taken a strong leadership stance in protecting Andrew Carnegie's vision of public libraries as "dedicated to the diffusion of knowledge." As a 2013 National Public Radio article noted, during the Depression when no one had any money, people went there to feed their brain.

The 2023-2024 Minnesota Legislative Biennium advanced the mission of our libraries in numerous significant ways:

- Provided the first funding increase since 2008 in support for regional public libraries.
- Funded \$4 Million in library construction grants to begin chipping away at an estimated \$94 Million in public library construction needs statewide.
- Enacted legislation guaranteeing the public's access to materials regardless of the viewpoint or opinion it contains. This law states that a public library must not ban, remove, or otherwise restrict access to a book or other materials based solely on its viewpoint or the messages, ideas or opinions it conveys.
- Created a statewide requirement for libraries to have collection development policies overseen by professionally trained librarians to ensure that all viewpoints are represented.

All Minnesotans should be proud of these accomplishments. I invite you to join me in expressing my gratitude for the bipartisan efforts of legislators, working with educators and librarians, to ensure that public and school libraries serve all who enter without regard for ideology. As a 17-year-old, Carnegie recognized that a library held the key to opportunity for everyone. The 2023-2024 Minnesota Legislative Session helps ensure that this legacy lives on.

We live in an era when the media and the internet are readily available to push information out to the public without regard for veracity and without differentiating facts from opinions or conspiracy theories. As a counterbalance, public libraries exist as a refuge for those in search of facts, thoughtful perspectives, and a deeper understanding of subjects as diverse as art and artificial intelligence.

In the weeks ahead, voters will choose who represents their interests on school boards, city councils, county commissions, and in legislative and federal offices. Please consider where candidates stand on freedom of expression. Do they seek to broaden intellectual freedom, or do they promote restrictive policies limiting individual's rights to make choices?

All of these contests have an impact on public and school libraries and their mission of providing unbiased, fact-based information from which individuals can make informed choices. Your vote is an important voice in protecting the First Amendment and preserving the integrity of libraries.

Terry Kalil, President
Lake Agassiz Regional Library System



Lake Agassiz Regional Library is headquartered in Moorhead and serves Becker, Clay, Clearwater, Mahnomen, Norman, Polk and Wilkin Counties with 22 library facilities.