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Tennessee: All's Well That Ends Well? Read On ...

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The Tennessee State Library and Archives and its Tennessee Regional Library System, involving 200 employees, were closed for the three days preceding the Fourth of July while the Tennessee General Assembly continued to debate a funding plan for FY 2002-03 well into the new fiscal year. Accommodation was finally reached late on July 3 and all units reopened on Friday, July 5.

Overall, the Tennessee libraries came out well after this protracted and acrimonious debate over taxes, which was featured in the New York Times, USA Today, and even the Guardian Unlimited. While we received no improvement items, we sustained no cuts for the new fiscal year.

That's the good news, and librarians are greatly relieved. Life is returning to normal, whatever that is these days. The not-so-good news is that the General Assembly relied heavily on a sales tax increase and certain "sin" taxes to balance the new budget, leaving the state vulnerable to later downturns and shortfalls over the next few years—and putting Tennessee near the top in terms of our sales tax rate, depending on the locality within the state. "We will have to deal with those issues as they arise, which they surely will," noted State Librarian Ed Gleaves.

All's well that ends well? "Well, yes, except that we never really reach the end," noted Gleaves, "especially in light of our work on our new Five-Year LSTA State Plan for library development and while we update The Volunteer Challenge, our long-range plans for the preservation of historical records in Tennessee. Federal funds will continue to be critical to our statewide library development, but we are determined to press for continued state support. Right now, we seem to have it. We'll take it."

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