EXHIBIT 8
DATE 1/12/2011
HB 2

Representative Hollandsworth, members of the Committee, for the record, my name is Don Allen, and I am Chairman of the Montana State Library Commission.

Please support the Montana State Library's budget request that is before you today.

You just heard from Darlene Staffeldt, State Librarian, about the wide-ranging services that the Montana State Library provides. After listening to Darlene's presentation, I hope that it is clear that the State Library reaches out to every Montanan.

The Montana State Library provides services and access to information that is not available anywhere else – and they provide this information free of charge to all Montanans, helping our citizens, businesses, and local, state, and federal governments.

Our Digital Library Division reaches out to state and federal employees and to the natural resource community, providing vast quantities of information that are accessible with the click of a mouse. This kind of access saves people, state and federal agencies, and business owners incredible amounts of time and money, which is only increasingly important as the national economy's woes continue to descend upon Montana.

Our Statewide Library Resources Division reaches all Montana citizens through 1) the consulting and training we provide to community libraries; 2) our statewide purchases that ensure up-to-the-minute accurate information on everything from health care to business management; 3) our innovative programs that get informational materials into Montanans' hands more quickly and efficiently, and 4) our provision of reading materials for those who would not be able to read otherwise.

More than ever before, access to information is the great equalizer. People are depending on their local Montana libraries more than ever before – to file for unemployment, to search for new jobs, to research starting a business, to complete homework assignments, even to find cheap family entertainment.

Access to information is the foundation of good government and of government accountability. Access to information is the foundation of an informed citizenry, of a strong business community, of a progressive educational foundation. Without the Montana State Library and its many services to our citizens, businesses, and government employees, the state of Montana would be seriously lacking in information resources.

The Montana State Library Commission has heard this over and over again – from librarians across the state and from library patrons , from our partners, from state agencies, and from private businesses – as we meet bimonthly either in Helena or in various locations around the state. And what we hear is that the services of the Montana State Library save people, businesses, organizations, and taxpayers time and money.

Our seven-member board is comprised of five individuals appointed by the Governor, as well as the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Denise Juneau, and an appointee of the Commissioner of Higher Education.

Our job as commissioners is to oversee the State Library, making sure that the State Library makes use of every innovation, every tool, and every available resource in its effort to provide information to all Montanans. We get the job done by listening to librarians and the staff of the State Library, to our partners and other state agencies, who keep us all informed about what we should try out, the services that are most needed around the state, and the best way to reach our goals.

While libraries provide free services, from books to computers to databases to movies, to every Montanan, these services aren't free for libraries. The State Library's budget, which is a very small portion of the general fund but is generously supported by federal funding and grants, goes a long way in assisting libraries from all over the state in providing stellar library services to their patrons who desperately need them.

If you're a patron of your local library, you probably already understand that libraries in Montana are cornerstones of the communities they serve and foster opportunities for economic growth. Libraries encourage business development; in fact, we've had several Montana libraries report that they are being used as a business center as small business owners try to cut costs and come to the library for internet access, printing, and faxing. But local libraries couldn't do this without the financial support of the Montana State Library.

Without the State Library, people – from business owners to government employees – would simply not know where to turn for answers to questions that affect everything from school homework projects to multi-million dollar highway projects.

Without the State Library, the information we work hard to make accessible to the public, to government employees, to business owners, and even to school children is invaluable and only available because of the work we do.

The value of the State Library's services to state and federal government, individuals, and businesses during this economic depression cannot be overstated. Your support of the State Library's budget will only help the State Library continue to do great things for all of Montana's citizens.

Thank you for your time and consideration.