

Appropriations

Little has happened regarding FY2002 appropriations since we wrote last month's column. We continue to expect that the main activity in Congress this fall will be "vigorous" debate over the remaining federal appropriations bills for FY2002. With constantly changing budget surplus projections, this is a slow and moving target.

At this writing, about half of the 13 appropriations bills are in conference, the rest have yet to be worked on in committee and have not gone through House or Senate.

A further complicating factor is the overall questionable health of the economy and the disappearing surplus. The president is demanding action and reiterating his requests to stay within budget. Of the appropriations bills that have been worked on, most require funds that are greater than those requested by the president. Pressures from the public to increase funding for education and the president's own desire to increase funding for defense may lead to uneven funding for many areas or overall rescissions (as have occurred in past years).

In recent years, some appropriations bills that came in at the requested level were cut further in the "end game" to free up funds for increases in education. This year, however, indications from the White House are that the remaining bills may be cut to make the overall spending balance out. The education community continues to agitate for larger increases than those in the president's budget. Buttressing the argument for increases are continuing increases in student populations and expected short falls of revenues in states. In addition, much attention is focused on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and whether, if some compromised version of that passes, there will be enough funds to come close to whatever funding levels are authorized in the bill.

When dialogue is put forward about how programs like Title I and the Individuals with Disabilities Act are not achieving any progress, the counter is that neither program has ever been fully funded.

The end game

In past years, education has profited by "end game" strategy in that so much attention is focused on the last remaining appropriations bills that even fiscal conservatives bow to the general will and increase funds. It could be that the continuing resolution strategy, which usually sets funding at FY2001 levels, could be used to capture some scarce funds, i.e., if the appropriations bills were not finalized by October 1, government will be continued by continuing resolution with spending levels set the same as the year before. Depending on how many weeks the resolution or resolutions last, some funds could be saved.

Also, with several bills remaining, often they are lumped together into an omnibus bill, which stands more of a chance to pass because all interests are combined and the wisdom is to vote for all or nothing. This has hazards as well, since amendments are placed during conference that may be onerous to some (like the filtering amendment) but swallowed to get the end result of passage to complete the funding for the next fiscal year.

National Book Festival a success!

On September 8, 2001, the National Book Festival was held at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. This exciting event, described online at <http://www.loc.gov/bookfest>, was hosted by First Lady Laura Bush. Bush is a lifelong champion of libraries, books, and reading.

Dozens of nationally renowned authors were on hand to discuss their work. The festival's Web site extends the event's impact far into the future with its many suggestions for celebrating books in local public libraries, schools, and families throughout the nation. ■

Mary Costabile is Office of Government Relations assistant director of ALA's Washington Office; e-mail: mcostabile@alawash.org