

## Where are libraries on the new legislative roadmap?

New members of the 104th Congress may still be using roadmaps to find their way around Washington, but they hardly need a legislative roadmap; the Republican "Contract with America" shows them the way. New Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-GA) is pushing for immediate change within the first 100 days. The House held a lengthy session on January 4, its first day, and immediately the path was set to implement the Contract. Many programs will be cut to pay for a balanced budget, tax cuts, and increased defense spending. Entire cabinet agencies, including the Department of Education, are potential victims of the budget-cutting axe.

Where libraries appear on this legislative roadmap is not yet clear. A positive sign is that Speaker Gingrich and several of his allies speak supportively about libraries and the new information technologies. On his second full day as Speaker, Gingrich spoke at the kickoff of THOMAS (see sidebar) at the Library of Congress (LC). There Gingrich emphasized the importance of this new legislative information service and predicted a dramatic increase in "intellectual populism" as legislative information becomes more available to citizens.

## LC unveils THOMAS

THOMAS is the new Library of Congress (LC) online public access system of congressional information available via the Internet to American citizens. LC announced that, by the end of January, THOMAS would provide access to the full text of bills from the 103rd and 104th Congresses, and the directory, calendar, and floor schedules for the House of Representatives. Soon the LC will, through its Congressional Research Service's Bill Service, summarize and track bills for the Congress. This will ultimately include the full text of bills to enable Americans to search more easily for legislation.

## Washington Hotline

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Building on the concept that knowledge equals power, Gingrich added that the new technologies will allow a virtual electronic town hall meeting on a scale that will create in the electronic age a truly democratic dialogue. He even said that, amidst all the anticipated budget cuts, the LC should *not* be cut, but have an increased budget.

But from another point of view, library and higher edu-

cation programs are vulnerable in this sea change. The Republicans, Democrats, and the Clinton Administration are all putting forth proposals involving middle class tax cuts that will bring substantial cuts in federal programs.

In the Senate, Republicans are expected to cut and consolidate many programs. An early rescission (cutting FY95 funds already appropriated if funds are not yet spent) and budget reconciliation package (identifying cuts to make in FY96) is expected shortly.

House minority leader Richard Gephardt (D-MO) has also proposed a middle class tax cut, paid for with unspecified cuts and savings. President Clinton has revived his own middle class tax cut proposal, to be paid for with major agency cuts, continued budget caps on discretionary spending, consolidations, and privatization. Although the Department of Education is not a major target, a significant portion of "other" cuts will be proposed.

## On the (budget) cutting edge

All library programs and many related programs from which libraries benefit will end up on the proposed cut lists. The programs listed below are at risk because they are listed on background documents to the House Republican "Contract with America," or because they are on the cut list developed earlier in 1994 by a Balanced Budget Task Force chaired by Rep. Gerald Solomon (R-NY). The Solomon list is considered to be one of the sources for a Republican budget rescission and reconciliation package.

- Library Services and Construction Act;

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- Higher Education Act title II library programs (FY96 funding in danger; FY95 rescissions could be proposed for LSCA VI and HEA II-B programs);

- School Library Media Resources program, ESEA III, part F (in danger as the overall agenda will make funding new programs very difficult);

- Arts and humanities endowments (must be reauthorized, either separately or as part of appropriations process, in order to be funded; thus NEA and NEH will be early targets for budget cutting and for those politicians who are opposed to any government role in support of the arts and humanities);

- High Performance Computing and Communications initiative (identified with Clinton/Gore Administration, and considered to be industrial policy);

- Improving America's Schools Act, ESEA reauthorization (Title III ed tech programs, school block grant, aid to disadvantaged schoolchildren, many other new and renewed programs are at risk);

- National libraries and related programs (budget cuts are likely to affect the Library of Congress, the National Agricultural Library, the National Library of Medicine, the National Archives, the Depository Library Program and GPO Access Act, and the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science).

In short, the entire federal role in support of all kinds of libraries and information services could be severely damaged or wiped out in a rush to cut and eliminate government programs and services and downsize government. In a new "devolution" movement, some federal roles could be shifted to the states. However, governors have already expressed concern that they do not have the resources, nor are they likely to receive the resources from the federal level, to take on all these roles.

### What can be done?

In higher education, every opportunity to share the college and research library message with your Congressional representatives and senators should be used. New and returning members need to be educated about the value of federal investment in library programs and related higher education efforts. Library programs are certainly at the top of the list when it comes to reaching the largest population for the least expenditure of federal dollars.

Now is the time to speak, write, and communicate the library success story to those who have the power to continue or eliminate library programs. Please continue to share information received from your congressional contacts with the ALA Washington Office. It will most certainly be an interesting year. ■