

## **NCLIS proposes new federal information agency**

At this writing, the 106th Congress is still in session and still negotiating final details of the FY2001 budget. No final decisions have been made on the Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill, which includes the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) and a related filtering rider. No one thought we'd still be at this point as we approach the holidays, and certainly no one knew we'd wait so long to select a president-elect.

The National Commission on Library and Information Science (NCLIS) unveiled a legislative proposal at the end of November that would establish a new federal information agency to possibly be called the "Public Information Resources Agency" or PIRA. It is unclear at this writing how the NCLIS proposal may fare in the unique political environment of the 107th Congress.

NCLIS has proposed that PIRA's "primary mission [would be] to serve as the federal government's focal point for providing timely dissemination and permanent public availability for its public information resources." If Congress and others approve such an agency, it would be part of the Executive Branch and would consolidate the Superintendent of Documents (SuDoc), the Government Printing Office (GPO), including the Federal Depository Library Program, and the National Technical Information Service (NTIS.)

There will be broad discussion about the NCLIS proposal at ALA's Midwinter Meeting in Washington, D.C. from January 12 to 16, 2001. ALA has not taken an official position on the proposal. Academic librarians are encouraged to attend the ALA Committee on Legislation Update on January 13 from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Also, please look for other forums at Midwinter on the NCLIS proposal sponsored by GODORT and other groups. Additional information on, and a variety of documents related to, the NCLIS Assessment and Legislative proposal are available on the Commission Web

site at <http://www.nclis.gov/govt/assess/assess.html>.

Some excerpts from the NCLIS recommendations:

- The Superintendent of Public Information Resources shall use whatever measures are necessary to ensure the timely identification, acquisition, organization, cataloging, and (where appropriate) indexing and abstracting of public information resources; to ensure timely delivery of public information resources—using a variety of formats, mediums, channels, and methods for access, dissemination, and distribution—appropriate to the content and its intended uses; and to expand and improve the permanent public availability of the federal government's public information resources.

- Regardless of any other provision of law, public information resources created, compiled, produced, or maintained by the executive, legislative and judicial branches shall be made available to the public at no charge through the PIRA.

- The exemption for "so-called cooperative publications which must be sold to be self-sustaining" is removed because the only self-sustaining programs for the sale of public information resources are within, or under the authority of, PIRA and the proposed law requires that any public information resources available for sale also be available without charge through PIRA Libraries.

- Consolidation of NTIS with the Superintendent of Documents Programs under PIRA places all information covered under the American Technology Pre-eminence Act in the Public Information Resources Access Program.

- PIRA is given responsibility for "permanent public availability," which is defined as making the maximum amount of public information resources available to, and accessible by, the public on an indefinite, continuing basis, free of charge; furthermore, public availability is meant to convey immediate access through the Web (or its successor technology) or availability through a widely distributed national network of public information resources access libraries. ■