

Following a highly charged campaign season and election, Congress began a lame-duck session in mid-November. It is important to remember that even after the months of unprecedented participation by the electorate in both parties' campaigns, your responsibilities as a citizen and a library supporter do not end when the election is over: your responsibilities extend to a year-round campaign to inform your senators and representatives about what's best for your library.

Libraries serve their communities and the people in them, so who better to carry the library message to Congress than the community itself—librarians, library trustees, Board members, and friends of libraries?

#### **What you can do to make a difference**

Make an effort to understand what is happening at the federal and state levels in addition to what is happening in your community. You can stay on top of local issues by reading the town newspaper, attending Board meetings, developing and maintaining relationships with your local elected officials, and regularly communicating important information to library trustees and Board members.

#### **Resources are at hand**

There are many resources available to you to aid communication with elected officials at the federal level. The U.S. House of Representatives ([www.house.gov/](http://www.house.gov/)) and the U.S. Senate ([www.senate.gov/](http://www.senate.gov/)) Web sites provide information on contacting elected officials, including how to write to Members of Congress, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses. The ALA Washington Office's Legislative Action Center ([congress.nw.dc.us/ala](http://congress.nw.dc.us/ala)) offers direct e-mail links and phone numbers for elected officials both in Washington, D.C., and in district offices. The Legislative Action Center has presidential and congressional biographical information; information and background on pending and current legisla-

tion; and talking points and alerts on issues of particular interest to the library community. It also gives you the ability to send e-mail to your legislator, print and fax letters, or send a letter by mail.

#### **Strategies to develop relationships**

Success stories happen in libraries everyday. Your task is to tell others about those stories. It is valuable to describe a particular program when dealing with your local, state, and federally elected officials. Write to your legislator (or call the office) and tell him or her directly how federal funds benefit your library. It is also important to make known how cuts in funding result in diminished benefits and services to the legislator's community.

The very best strategy is to invite legislators to your library to see your programs in action. Many elected officials enjoy and remember being a guest at their local library, and it is a perfect photo opportunity (use the photograph, with appropriate approvals, to promote and market services at your library or send it to your local paper to publish and encourage media coverage of library programs).

When we involve a local, state, or national official in our business, we give them something to be proud of, something to be part of, something they can own as part of our community.

#### **It's all about you**

Elected officials run for office on their ability to get things accomplished—when they run for re-election, they run on their accomplishments. If you want elected officials to continue to take action on your issues, you need to communicate your areas of interest and concern to them directly. Build personal relationships with your elected officials, tell them your stories, and speak with them regularly. Build your foundation, identify grassroots advocates that will speak out in support of the library. You, as a constituent, are the most persuasive advocate.

Good luck! ■

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