

110th Congress sworn in

For the first time in 12 years, Democrats controlled both the House and the Senate when the 110th Congress convened on Thursday, January 4, 2007. The 110th Congress is also the most diverse in history; the freshman class of the House has the first Muslim and the first two Buddhists to serve in Congress. There are 90 women in the 110th Congress, 74 in the House, and 16 in the Senate. There are 42 black members of the House, 27 Hispanic members, and 7 Asian members. With a 233-202 majority, House Democrats elected Nancy Pelosi (D-California) as the first woman Speaker of the House.

Despite a new spirit of bipartisanship, bitter partisan divisions are expected to slow down the workings of Congress, especially as Congress deals with divisive issues, such as Iraq and the looming Presidential election. Senate Democrats have a razor-thin 51-49 majority in the Senate, far short of the 60 votes needed to overcome filibusters and pass legislation. Democrats and Republicans are keeping a close eye on the health of Senator Tim Johnson (D-South Dakota), who had brain surgery in December. If Johnson's condition requires him to leave the Senate, the Republican Governor of South Dakota would likely appoint a Republican to finish Johnson's term. That would make for an evenly split chamber, with Vice President Dick Cheney, as president of the Senate, able to cast the tie-breaking vote.

Immigration reform, the situation in Iraq, lobbying reform, balancing the budget, telecommunications reform, and a number of education issues, including reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act, are among the many issues facing Congress. The 110th Congress will also have to sort out the

remaining unfinished fiscal year (FY) 2007 appropriations bills, while beginning work on FY 2008 appropriations bills. In recent years, the Senate has provided more funding for domestic programs than the House. The new focus on increased funding in the Democrat-led House will help to bring the House and Senate Committees closer.

Further, although the House of Representatives' First One Hundred Hours will likely not include specific library issues, sponsors in both sides of Congress, within hours of being sworn in, introduced legislative proposals related to Internet policy, telecommunications, and broadband deployment. Though we may not know the full impact of the changes in leadership of the critical Senate and House Judiciary and Commerce committees, we do know that the same set of issues for libraries and information services are being readied for further debate before the 110th Congress. The highlights of the pending agenda read like that of the 109th Congress, although the approach of the new majority will shift the emphasis.

Finally, for those interested in network neutrality, because legislation did not pass last year, there are no assurances that this issue prevails in the Internet environment. While many states are addressing this issue now, there is likely to be another effort at the federal level by both sides on this issue. ALA will continue to support effective network neutrality policies that assure freedom of expression on the Internet and for equity for all types of information providers. It is hoped that any new discussions will be less polarized and able to come to consensus on this difficult and divisive issue.

Additional information on the 110th Congress and federal legislation can be found at the ALA Washington Office's Web site (www.alawash.org) and blog (blogs.ala.org/districtdispatch.php). *zz*

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