

February federal funding saga pulls libraries into the drama

When President Obama released his FY2012 budget proposal on February 14, the future of library federal funding and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) looked pretty bleak. Yet, by day's end, the President's vision for next year was overshadowed by the Republican-led Congress' efforts to finalize federal funding for the current fiscal year while also taking a kitchen-sink approach to legislating.

In his FY2012 budget request, the President asked for \$193.2 million for the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA), which is approximately \$20 million below the current funding level. \$20 million may not sound like a draconian cut, but it is a 10 percent cut to the primary source of federal funding for libraries. Under his recommendation, LSTA programs—grants to states, the National Leadership Program, and the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program—were all targeted for cuts.

The budget proposal called for reducing the grants to states' funding level from \$172.5 million to \$161.3 million, cutting the National Leadership Program to \$12.2 million, and dropping the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program from \$24.5 million to \$15.6 million.

Fortunately, the President's budget request is only a considered a blueprint for Congress. However, the unfortunate part is that after it is released, both the House and the Senate must produce their own budgets and carry out the appropriations process. The rally cries for deeper cuts coming from the right indicated that the biggest battle might not be with the President but with the Congress.

Meanwhile, since last year's Congress did not pass all of the appropriations bills needed

to fund the federal government for 2011, the House of Representatives was in the process of finalizing H.R. 1, commonly referred to as the "Continuing Resolution or C.R.," at the same time that the President's budget for 2012 was being released.

With the ink practically still drying on the 2012 budget proposal, the House of Representatives threw a curveball at library advocates—pitched by U.S. Rep. Scott Garrett (R-NJ-5). Garrett submitted an amendment to the C.R. to zero out IMLS all together.

Garrett's attempt to strip support away from America's libraries sent off a chain of action from the ALA, and the ALA Washington Office credits our association's committed grassroots advocacy network for the ultimate withdrawal of the amendment. By the late afternoon of the 16th, a Garrett staff member confirmed to Office of Government Relations Assistant Director Jeff Kratz that the congressman would not "push" for the amendment.

Garrett's amendment was one of a slew—somewhere in neighborhood of 700—of amendments to be offered to the C.R.

One amendment that the association did support was offered by U.S. Rep. Mike Doyle (D-PA-14), which bolstered the library community's calls for more open access to federal taxpayer funded research. Doyle's amendment called for the National Institutes of Health's public access policy to apply to all departments funded by the act that expend more than \$100 million for extramural research. This "nod" was a step in the right direction for procuring more open access—regardless of the outcome of the amendment itself.

Given all the legislative drama over passing funding for 2011, the process for 2012 is sure to be just as uncertain. The ALA Washington Office urges all library advocates to use the ALA Legislative Action Center (capwiz.com/ala/home/) and to subscribe to the Washington Office blog, the District Dispatch. ♪

Jenni Terry is press officer at ALA's Washington Office, e-mail: jterry@alawash.org