

The second 100 days and still counting . . .

Though there were no hearings, floor debates, or new bills introduced while both houses of Congress were in recess in recent weeks, it still has not been quiet.

One major focus of activity has been the **Telecommunications Competition and Deregulation Act of 1995, S. 652**. There is vigorous debate on many aspects of this bill and advocates on all sides of the issue have used the recess to lobby senate staffers and develop coalitions. Education and library groups, including ALA, have been working to preserve the critical Snowe-Rockefeller-Kerrey-Exon amendment (SRKE) which would provide K-12 schools, libraries, and rural health care providers with a form of incremental-cost-based or "affordable" rates to connect to the information superhighway.

The regional Bell operating companies (REBOCs) have strongly opposed the SRKE amendment as a type of subsidy they claim unfairly burdens the REBOC's with requirements to provide at-cost services to schools and libraries. This is not an easy battle, and school/library coalition advocates need every ally possible to support the amendment. Library advocates are asked to write their senators to encourage support for SRKE. Similar legislation has been introduced in the House by Reps. Thomas Bliley (R-VA) and Jack Fields (R-TX), but it does not include any provisions similar to SRKE.

A number of library and information professional associations have endorsed the SRKE amendment in a letter to Sen. Larry Pressler (R-SD), chair of the Senate Commerce Committee. The May 8 letter was sent from ALA, the American Council on Education, the American Association of Law Libraries, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, the Association of Research Libraries, the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies, the Computing Research Association, and the Special Libraries Association. The Medical Library Association



will also be endorsing SRKE. (The full text of the joint letter will be posted in ALAWON.)

Communications Decency Act: Library advocates and others concerned with First Amendment issues have also been working to remove the Exon-Gorton amendment from S. 652. This Communications Decency Act of 1995 would expand prohibitions against obscene or harassing use of

the telephone to all telecommunications devices, and could lead to censorship of private online communications in violation of the First Amendment. Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT) has proposed a less intrusive alternative, the Child Protection, User Empowerment, and Free Expression in Interactive Media Study Bill (S. 714), calling for a study by the Justice and Commerce Departments of technological means of empowering users to control electronic information they receive. Library advocates are asking for removal of the Exon-Gorton amendment from S. 652 and to support the Leahy alternative.

FY95 rescissions: Library supporters have already had an effect on the FY95 rescissions of appropriations approved for library programs by last year's Congress. Of the \$34.7 million in cuts to FY95 library programs first proposed by the House Appropriations Committee, \$8 million was restored on the House floor, and \$23.8 million more was restored by the Senate Appropriations Committee. The Senate recommended limiting the rescissions-cuts to \$2.9 million. The rescission package will now go to a joint conference committee. Senate Appropriations Committee members joined with those Congressional representatives appointed to start their conferencing the week of May 10.

FY96 Appropriations: By press time, the critical FY96 budget process will have heated up. Library supporters can not underestimate the very difficult political climate that surrounds these pending debates and grassroots support is needed. It will be a tough fight to save the various library programs. Budget documents will be released shortly and reveal how the 104th Congress will address library and education programs during its second 100 days. ■

Lynne E. Bradley is deputy executive director of ALA's Washington Office; e-mail: leb@alawash.org