

FY 2001 appropriations bills delayed

As of mid-October, final work is not completed on several appropriations bills and the 106th Congress may remain in session until October 27. The federal government continues to function under week-by-week continuing resolutions maintaining previous funding levels on a temporary, prorated basis.

This type of congressional end-game waiting period is filled with opportunities and risks. Many legislative proposals get tacked onto the appropriations bills as amendments or riders. Inside the Beltway, the resultant appropriations bills are known as "Christmas trees," hung with many differing "ornaments" otherwise alleged to be pork, special interest provisions, or other pet projects.

Filtering update

Proponents of filtering mandates have had them attached as amendments to the Labor-HHS appropriations bill. ALA and many other groups have continued extensive pressure to kill these filtering amendments. If passed, the mandates would apply to libraries receiving e-rate discounts (public libraries and K-12 schools) and those receiving Library Services Technology Act (LSTA) monies. Various "compromises" are circulating behind the scenes, but it is impossible to predict what will happen at this writing. More to come on this issue at the federal and local levels (see: <http://www.ala.org/washoff/filteringmandate.html>).

Database bill update

An example of the risk during such late and protracted budget negotiations deals with one of the "dueling database bills," H.R. 354. Earlier in the fall it appeared that neither of the database bills would come to a vote during the 106th Congress. ALA and others have preferred H.R. 1858, the Consumer and Investor Access to Information Act of 1999, sponsored by House Commerce Committee Chairman Tom Bliley (R-Virginia), ranking member John Dingell (D-Michigan), and several others.

However, in early October, Howard Coble (R-North Carolina), chairman of the House Judiciary Subcommittee and chief sponsor of H.R. 354 (the Collections of Information Antipiracy Act), indicated that he would work to get H.R. 354 onto one of the appropriations bills. The realtors across the country had been lobbying heavily for this bill, while the library community and others have fought it, preferring H.R. 1858. (For a comparison of H.R. 354 and H.R. 1858 see: <http://www.ala.org/washoff/database.html>.)

On October 11 Coble acknowledged that his bill would not make it through this Congress, and vowed that he would revisit the legislation in the next Congress. The battle over H.R. 354 is won for now, but the war on database legislation is not yet over.

UCITA coming to your state

The Uniform Computer Information Transactions Act (UCITA) is a proposed state contract law developed to regulate transactions in intangible goods, such as computer software, online databases, and other information products in digital form. Libraries, consumer protection groups, and a number of businesses have been among those opposing the enactment of UCITA as it was introduced in several states starting in the fall of 1999. Publishers and large software producers are the primary supporters of UCITA.

ALA has expanded its UCITA efforts. An Email Tutorial from ALA's Office for Information Technology Policy will be offered November 6-20, 2000. The Washington Office has updated and redesigned its Web pages devoted to UCITA at: <http://www.ala.org/washoff/ucita/index.html>. ALA, along with the Association of Research Libraries, American Association of Law Libraries, Medical Library Association, and Special Libraries Association, is sponsoring a teleconference on UCITA on December 13, 2000, from 1-4 p.m. (EST). See <http://www.arl.org/ucita.html> for details on registering for the conference. For additional information contact Carol Ashworth, UCITA Grassroots coordinator, at (800) 941-8478 or (202) 628-8410; e-mail: cashworth@alawash.org. ■

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