President Bush announces FY 2005 budget

On February 2, President Bush sent Congress a $2.3 trillion budget for FY 2005 that would limit non-defense, non-homeland security spending to less than a 1 percent increase.

Despite record deficits and state budget cuts, Bush proposed $220 million for the Library Program at the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS), an increase of 11 percent. Within the request was $23 million for the Librarians for the 21st Century program, a $3 million increase.

Under the budget, the Department of Education would receive $53.7 billion in discretionary funding, a $1.7 billion increase (or 3 percent over the FY 2004 level). The budget request includes $1.1 billion, an increase of $101 million (or 10 percent) for the Reading First State Grants program. The Early Reading First program, an important complement to Reading First, would receive $132 million, an increase of $38 million (or 40 percent).

The Improving Literacy through School Libraries program would be funded at $19.8 million, the same level as FY 2004. Despite increases in the overall funding, Bush proposes eliminating several key programs in his budget, such as the Even Start family literacy program, Star Schools, and Community Technology Centers program.

Included in the president's budget, and also part of his Jobs for the 21st Century initiative, is $100 million for the Striving Readers Initiative. This program would make competitive grants available to states and school districts to develop, implement, and evaluate effective reading interventions for middle and high school students reading significantly below grade level.

For confirmation of the budget numbers, visit ALA's Web site at www.ala.org/.

OITP offers "Accessibility Basics for Librarians"

From March 15 through June 18, 2004, ALA's Office for Information Technology Policy (OITP) will host an online e-mail tutorial on accessibility of library materials and services for people with disabilities. Similar in format to the successful privacy, copyright, UCITA, and licensing tutorials offered in past years, the accessibility tutorial will examine aspects of accessibility for library professionals in 20 to 25 brief but informative messages written by Jessica Brodey, senior policy counsel for Leslie Harris and Associates, in collaboration with OITP staff. Brodey has worked with the Technology, Education, and Accessible Media Coalition, comprised of disability rights groups, educational organizations, and technology companies working to increase access to educational technology for students with disabilities.

In addition to an overview of relevant law, the tutorial will help librarians understand how to deal with barriers to access to library materials, computers, Web sites, and systems. It will also provide guidance to libraries on how to maximize accessibility for patrons with disabilities and identify best practices for ensuring that library policies are compliant with existing law.

The tutorial course is free to ALA members, and signing up is easy. If you are an ALA member, e-mail your member number to Kathy Mitchell at kmitchell@alawash.org with the subject line "tutorial." You will be subscribed to the list and will receive an automated welcome message within a few days.

Non-ALA members can also receive the tutorial by sending a $30 check or money order made payable to ALA. Please include your e-mail address with your check to be subscribed. Send the check to: ALA, Office for Information Technology Policy, 1301 Pennsylvania Avenue NW Suite 403, Washington, D.C. 20004, Attn: Kathy Mitchell.

All subscribers will receive their first tutorial message on March 15. You can read your messages when they arrive or save them for later, but we recommend reading the messages in the order in which they are received. Please note the e-mail tutorial is one-way communication, and you will not be able to post to a discussion list.

For more information, contact Kathy Mitchell at kmitchell@alawash.org with the subject line "tutorial," or call ALA's Washington Office at (800) 941-8478. ■

Josh Farrelman is appropriations lobbyist and Bernadette Murphy is communications specialist at ALA's Washington Office, e-mail: bmurphy@alawash.org and jfarrelman@alawash.org