

Telecommunications Act of 1996

President Clinton signed the latest telecommunications legislation on February 8 at the Library of Congress. Speaking in the Jefferson Building's main Reading Room, Vice-President Gore's opening remarks ended with a dialogue, via the Internet, with Lily Tomlin's character, Ernestine. President Clinton and Vice-President Gore commented on their goal to

connect all of America's schools, libraries, and hospitals to the information superhighway, and how this bill will help realize that goal. House Speaker Newt Gingrich and other Congressional leaders on the pertinent Congressional commerce committees, also made comments. The final version of the bill signed by Clinton has few changes from the conference committee report published in the *Congressional Record* on January 31. Two provisions that most affect libraries in the legislation will now move forward to other venues for debate.

Internet content restrictions. ALA is analyzing the serious impact on libraries of the Internet content restrictions in the new law. There is grave concern that these restrictions will threaten libraries' use of the Internet and other public access to advanced telecommunications services. It is believed that this "chilling" provision compromises freedom of speech on the Internet. ALA is analyzing these restrictions and considering its litigation options. Academic librarians are encouraged to share their experiences and perspectives on the impact of these Internet restrictions with Judith Krug at the ALA Office of Intellectual Freedom.

Discounted rates. Of concern to LSCA-eligible libraries and K-12 schools is the provision for discounted rates, the Snowe-Rockefeller-Kerrey-Exon provision in the universal service section of the act. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) will conduct a rulemaking process which library advocates and others from the K-12 community are already preparing to participate in. Details of this process are yet to be worked out, although it is expected that the three FCC commissioners and four state public utilities commissioners will be

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appointed to a joint FCC-state board to begin the proceedings on universal service on March 8.

Intellectual property

The House of Representatives' Subcommittee on Courts and Intellectual Property held two half days of hearings during the week of February 1 on the NII Copyright Protection Act of 1995: legislation intended to implement the recommen-

dations of the Commerce Department's "White Paper" on copyright and the information infrastructure. While Jeanne Simon, chair of the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) was invited to testify before the panel, no professional library organization or group of organizations was given the opportunity to do so. ALA, along with more than 40 other groups, was invited to submit written testimony prior to February 15 for the Subcommittee's consideration. ALA jointly authored that statement with the American Association of Law Libraries, the Association of Research Libraries, the Medical Library Association, and the Special Libraries Association.

The House plans no further hearings at this time on H.R. 2441, although the Senate Judiciary Committee is expected to hold a one-day session to take testimony on S. 1284 (an identical bill) some time in March. ALA, together with other members of the Digital Future Coalition, will push for the opportunity to appear before the committee for the purpose of stressing that any enhancement of copyright protection afforded by this Congress must also preserve and enhance the public's access to information under the Fair Use Doctrine (codified at Section 107 of the current Copyright Act).

Detailed information about this legislation may be found online through the Digital Future Coalition homepage at <http://guess.worldweb.net/dfc>. ■

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