

Post-election shuffle and the fiscal cliff

by Jeff Kratz, assistant director, ALA Office of Government Relations

On the heels of the 2012 election, ALA's Washington Office is busily analyzing the results. Control "inside the beltway" of the White House and Congress remains unchanged as we head into the 113th Congress in January 2013. With the re-election of President Obama, Democrats will retain control of the Executive Office, as well as the U.S. Senate, and Republicans retain control of the U.S. House of Representatives. However, as some members of Congress retired or lost re-election bids, shake-ups will occur as members jockey for key leadership positions on Congressional committees and subcommittees. In addition, as is common in second-term presidencies, there will likely be several turnovers in other leadership positions.

As Congress returned to Capitol Hill in mid-November, during the "lame duck period" that extends until the conclusion of 112th Congress at the end of the year, all attention will be devoted to the budgetary fiscal cliff our nation is quickly approaching. The fiscal cliff is comprised of a series of laws that are set to expire or go into effect at the beginning of 2013. These laws could have a major impact on the financial health of our economy if Congress fails to act and avoid some or all of the measures.

One of the most devastating of these laws not only for the country, but also for libraries, would be if Congress allows for sequestration to be enacted on January 2, 2013. Sequestration is a deep, across the board cut to all discretionary federal spending. These cuts were put into place in August 2011 under the Budget Control Act to be enacted if the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reeducation, dubbed by the media

as the "Super Committee," failed to cut \$1.2 trillion from the federal budget over nine years. Unfortunately, the Super Committee failed to come to an agreement on necessary spending cuts, thus setting up automatic sequestration cuts in January.

Furthermore, in September 2012, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), as directed by Congress in the Sequestration Transparency Act of 2012, released a Sequester Report that detailed the impact sequestration would have on the federal government. In this report, OMB stated there would be an 8.2 percent cut to all non-defense discretionary programs. This deep cut would also include the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), reducing its budget by \$19 million. Unfortunately, funding sources within IMLS, and other library funding sources in the federal budget were not specifically detailed in this report, so it is not clear on how deeply they would be impacted.

This fall, while many of their colleagues were campaigning, eight bipartisan senators known as the "gang of eight," who were not facing re-election met behind closed doors in Washington, D.C., to try and find an agreeable solution to sequestration and the fiscal cliff. The content of these meetings have not been made public, and it is unclear if they were able to reach an agreement. However, what is known is that neither the Republicans nor the Democrats in the House or the Senate would like to see sequestration take effect. *rw*

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