

***At Risk - The Federal  
Investment in Libraries,  
Archives, and Museums***

*By State Librarian  
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On March 16, 2017, President Donald Trump proposed a budget (*America First - A Budget Blueprint to Make America Great Again*) for discretionary spending in federal Fiscal Year 2018. It detailed proposed spending by department, amounting to an overall 10% increase in defense spending and a 10% decrease in non-defense outlays. Of great concern to libraries, archives,

museums and other memory institutions is the proposal to eliminate the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). Over the years these programs have funded a variety of important projects in libraries, museums, and archives across Connecticut. The State Library receives annual funding from IMLS under the Grants to States program as part of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) and has been the direct beneficiary of several NEH and IMLS grants. For Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2016, the State Library received \$2,022,715.00 in LSTA funds. Over the past several years the State Library has received NEH grants totaling \$524,034 under the National Digital Newspaper Program. That funding is being used to digitize historically significant Connecticut newspapers for inclusion in the Library of Congress' Chronicling America project.

As a rule, presidential budgets are pretty much dead on arrival. But we are in a political climate where some of the old rules don't apply. With Republican control of the Presidency and Congress, there is some reason to be concerned about the future of NEA, NEH, and IMLS. In 2015 the U.S. House Republicans issued "The Path to Prosperity: Fiscal Year 2015 Budget Resolution" which called for eliminating, you guessed it, the NEA, NEH, and IMLS. In reference to the IMLS, the plan said "[t]his function can be funded at the state and local level and augmented significantly by charitable contributions from the private sector." I think we all know the state and local funding situation. The LSTA funds have a maintenance of effort requirement which has been important in maintaining state funding for libraries.

The federal government has provided aid for public libraries since 1956. On June 19 of that year, President Eisenhower signed the Library Services Act (LSA) into law. Although the federal role in support of libraries has been questioned over the years, one constant has been the need to serve the underserved and the disadvantaged. There has been debate over the years as to whether the program should foster innovation through grants for demonstration projects or fund ongoing services.

A theme throughout the history of this program is the important role libraries play in providing the citizenry with access to learning opportunities and information in a variety of formats in a rapidly changing economy, and the need to support libraries in these efforts.

Throughout its history, the program has been state based. With overall goals established by Congress, the states have administered their grants to best meet the needs of their libraries and the citizens they serve.

Congress debated the Library Services and Construction Act in 1963 as the successor to LSA. In the debates, Thomas McIntyre (D-NH) stated that:

*We are living in a complex and rapidly changing age. It is an age built upon the creation, the collection, and the rapid dissemination of accurate information. At the very heart of this communications chain stands the American free public library which collects and makes available books and other materials to all who have need of them.*