

WASHINGTON HOTLINE



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I'd like to take this month's column to give you the flavor of the House-Senate conference on Higher Education Act reauthorization, because the favorable outcome for HEA library programs was the result of that process. When the House and Senate pass different versions of a bill and each insists on its own version, a conference committee is appointed, usually consisting of members of the appropriate subcommittees plus the chairs and ranking minority members of the full committees with jurisdiction over the bill.

HEA House and Senate teams began a negotiating process to resolve from 500-700 differences between the two versions of S. 1965 in a series of sessions (preceded by and interspersed with staff meetings) from June 29 to September 12. A quorum on each side was necessary to conduct business and attendance was high, although members were in and out to greet constituents, attend other committee meetings, and take urgent phone calls. Often recesses were called so that House or Senate members could leave for a floor vote. Hordes of higher education lobbyists attended these sessions, often waiting in the halls for a couple of hours to be sure of a seat. Although one could not interrupt a session, it was possible to speak with staff and occasionally with members during breaks.

Most sessions were chaired by Sen. Robert Stafford (R-VT) and Rep. Bill Ford (D-MI). The House wanted to proceed title by title, which would have brought title II up early, but the Senate wanted to settle overall funding first, especially before discussing new or unfunded programs. Sen. Dan Quayle (R-IN) said II-D technology grants for college libraries was a nice idea, but he didn't know how affordable it was until he knew the bill's total. Rep. Ford said the House members would not tie numbers to current funding; all growth for five years would be foreclosed that way. II-D, he said, was not a spending item but an authorization developed by Ford and Rep. Tom Coleman (R-MO). Quayle responded that Senators were not going to discuss items just on their merits; they couldn't fund them all so they probably wouldn't fund any such programs.

Preliminary sparring went on for some time, with offers, counteroffers, and counter-counteroffers being exchanged in such polite language as "Mr. Chairman, the Senate is not prepared to respond to your generous offer." This usually meant that the Senate didn't like the offer at all, but would have the staff take a close look at it overnight, and probably propose a counter-offer the next day. In mid-August, conferees did agree on an overall cap for the bill--authorizations would total no more than \$10.2 billion in FY 1987, with 5% growth allowed in each of the four succeeding years.

Shortly after this, the Senate agreed to recede to the House provision

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to authorize \$1 million for library acquisition of foreign periodicals. There was a spontaneous burst of applause from the observing lobbyists, because it was about the first agreement reached on a programmatic difference. That break in the logjam was followed by a trade on title II issues. The Senate agreed to accept the House II-D technology grants, and the House agreed to give up a \$75,000 authorization for the evaluation study by the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science of the II-A need criteria for college library grants, although the requirement for the study remained in place.

One important title II issue remained: How much of that \$10.2 billion cap would title II get as an authorization or ceiling above which funding could not rise, and how would it be divided among title II programs? Dividing up the cap was the last issue decided. The House proposed a package which included \$29 million for title II. The Senate counter-offer had only \$20 million. There seemed to be an impasse, and conferees were running out of time since adjournment was scheduled for October 3. Senate conferees, although including solid library supporters such as Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-RI), were reluctant to provide growth room for non-student aid provisions, and particularly for unfunded programs. House members were just as adamant about the importance of certain non-student aid titles.

Finally, the Senate agreed to an additional \$25 million for institution-based aid, to be divided up as the House conferees wished. Reps. Charles Hayes (D-IL) and Major Owens (D-NY) insisted that \$10 million of that sum be added to the \$20 million in the Senate offer for title II. Rep. Ford quickly summarized his colleagues' consensus, and Ford and Stafford agreed they had a deal. The conference agreement was later agreed to by the full House and Senate, and signed into law (PL 99-498) by the President.

So title II was reauthorized at \$30 million, divided \$10 million for II-A library resources grants targeted to needy colleges, \$5 million for II-B training and research, \$10 million for II-C major research library grants, and \$5 million for II-D technology and cooperation grants. Library program authorizations are above current funding (\$7 million) by a higher percentage than almost any other HEA program area.

The next challenge for the academic library community is to work HARD for actual funding, especially for the unfunded II-A and II-D. We must work for funding because libraries need it, but also to show our HEA library champions that they did not work for us in vain. Champions won't remain champions unless constituents thank them and follow it up with hard work on funding. Please be alert to calls for action on this next year.