

Current Developments in Federal Support for Libraries in The United States

by CHRISTOPHER WRIGHT

In early September 1975 representatives of several important library and information science groups met at the White House with officials of the Ford administration to discuss the problems of financing library services in the United States today.

The meeting was worthy of note, though little of substance was discussed, because it represented the first overture in five years from a Republican administration that has repeatedly argued in its budget presentations to Congress that the federal government should not spend money to support public and academic libraries across the country. Throughout the Nixon years the spokesmen for the administration had insisted that supporting library service was a responsibility of state and local governments and not of the national government. Indeed, since 1969 officials in the U. S. Office of Education, which administers the three major federal programs that provide grants for libraries, had each year asked Congress specifically not to provide money in the budget for the library programs authorised in law.¹

But Congress, not the President, has the final say on the federal budget. After the White House submits its budget to the House of Representatives in January the Congressmen on the appropriations committee hear witnesses and make their own decision on how much money should be appropriated for specific programs. The recommendations of this appropriations committee are then voted on by the House and Senate and, in effect, Congress may rewrite a President's entire budget. Furthermore, Congress can compel an administration to spend money on programs such as the library programs which it would like to cancel.

For five years Congress has insisted on continuing federal aid to libraries over the protests of the administration.² This past year the chairman of the appropriations committee in the House of Representatives was sharply critical of the lower echelon bureaucrats who appeared before his subcommittee requesting that Congress kill the very programs they were supposedly

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