

Statement of Dr. James H. Billington
The Librarian of Congress
before the
Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Fiscal 2012 Budget Request
March 11, 2011

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Honda, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to present the Library of Congress fiscal 2012 budget request.

The Congress of the United States has been the greatest patron of a library in the history of the world. Mr. Chairman, all of us at the Library of Congress are deeply grateful for the Congress's support over the last 211 years.

What Congress created, sustained, and instructed its library to undertake through good times and bad has made this institution into (1) the world's largest collection of knowledge in almost all languages and formats, (2) the closest thing to a mint record of American private sector creativity and innovation, and (3) the leading American public institution in both capturing transient information on the internet and sharing our collections online.

In presenting our budget request for fiscal 2012, Mr. Chairman, I propose to answer three big questions that we have asked of ourselves – and that you might well wish to ask of us at this time of so many pressing national concerns:

1. What does the Library of Congress do that is important for the United States of America?

The Library embodies key ideals on which this nation was founded: the right of a free people to have unfettered access to knowledge, the necessity for a productive people to have material incentives for innovation and the need to preserve the record of our citizens' creativity.

Serving the Congress is the Library of Congress's top priority. The Library's Congressional Research Service has for almost a century embodied the distinctive American ideal of a knowledge-based democracy. CRS serves Congress exclusively. And the Library's Law Library also provides objective non-partisan information and analysis to the First Branch of Government.

Never have the core activities of the Library been more important to America than now in the information age. Both our international economic competitiveness and our national security depend increasingly on knowledge and information drawn from every part of the globe. The Library of Congress is the mother lode of the nation's strategic information reserve for the work of the Congress and other government agencies. Even as we speak, our Cairo office is systematically sending us the pictures, pamphlets, and social messaging of the current uprisings in the Middle East.

The Library is making a unique and original contribution to the all-important crisis in K-12 education throughout America with its authoritative internet outreach. We are delivering more than 20 million items free of charge, most of which are primary documents of American history and culture. We have also now begun to include in our widely used web services similarly unique documents from other world cultures – drawing from our own collections and from many of our 135 partner institutions from all over the USA and the world. We are also working with 167 other U.S. partners on our congressionally-mandated program for digital preservation.

2. A second – and crucial – question at this time is: *Have we responsibly addressed the massive fiscal challenges posed by the federal deficit about which the Congress is understandably concerned?*

For a number of years now, we have been submitting constrained budgets. If we set aside the normal inflationary pay and price level increases that all agencies request, the Library in the last four years has asked for program increases averaging only 2.3% of the base budget. The committees have commended these modest requests.

In fiscal 2012, the Library requests funding to meet a critical need to expand incident handling and response capacity to keep pace with the evolving IT security threat landscape. The enhancements include expanding the incident handling and response function to 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year. The enhancements also include advanced security incident and event monitoring, net flow analysis, and other systems and processes commonly used across other government agencies.

The Library also requests funding and 17 FTEs for CRS, first requested in fiscal 2011, to broaden its expertise and strengthen analytical capacity in the areas of science and technology, health care, financial economics and accounting, and social policy related to employment, immigration, and the workforce. This funding will enable CRS to provide enhanced multidisciplinary analysis on complex and emerging policy issues before the Congress. Additional analytical capacity will also give CRS the long-term flexibility to adapt to rapidly changing issues and debates in these critical areas.

These two program requests represent less than 1% of the fiscal 2011 Continuing Resolution base. The great bulk (77%) of our overall 3.45% requested increase is for the mandatory pay and price level increases of \$18 million.

Library programs are not "nice to have." Almost all provide one-of-a-kind national resources and services that no one else in either our public or private sectors can reasonably be expected to replicate.

Even under a best-case budget outlook, funding at the fiscal 2010 level for both fiscal 2011 and 2012 would result in an effective budget cut of more than \$36 million, or 5.6%, against the fiscal 2010 base. This alone would require substantial program and staff sacrifices. And some of the reduction scenarios currently being proposed could cut to the bone and require us to take steps that not even past wars and depressions have forced us to consider in the Library's 211-year history. This possibility leads to a final question.

3. How would we handle major budget cuts?

We would have to ask ourselves where among the many services that we uniquely perform we should reduce funding: In our deacidification of brittle books and manuscripts that will then become unusable? In our cataloging and standards service that will increase the burden on already strained local and state libraries? In providing fewer books and magazine titles free to 800,000 blind and physically handicapped Americans who generally read much more than sighted people?

Even if we cut back our public services significantly, we would reluctantly also have to consider furloughing or cutting back on personnel. Our dedicated, experienced, and multi-talented staff accounts for 63% of the Library's overall budget, and 89% of CRS's. The Library is now doing far more work than in 1992 but with 1,076 fewer people on the staff. Half of those reductions have occurred just in the last five years.

We are also critically dependent on sustaining the successful collections storage program at Ft. Meade and ask for your approval of funds for construction of Module 5—included in the AOC budget.

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Honda, and Members of the Subcommittee, America's oldest federal cultural institution has become part of the innovative infrastructure of America in the information age. I thank you again for your support of the Library and for your consideration of our fiscal 2012 request.