



CAPITOL CORRESPONDENCE

LOOKING AHEAD TO THE SECOND TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

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I am writing this column on a bright and very cold Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday. It is also Inauguration Day, signifying the start of a new administration with its own priorities and worldview. While I do not presume to know exactly what actions the Trump Administration will take related to libraries, there are numerous reasons that librarians at the school, public, and academic levels should be concerned. (Please note that I have had to rewrite significant parts of this column today to include new executive orders.

And I'm sure there will be many more developments before you read this. It is a moving target!)

The first area of concern is the continuation of funding for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). During the first Trump administration, the White House repeatedly proposed



PHOTO BY SUZY BROOKS ON UNSPLASH

eliminating funding for this crucial program, which helps to fund literacy and technology programs in libraries and museums across the country. Fortunately, library advocates were successful in getting this funding restored. But the threat seems likely to continue in the upcoming administration, with a greater chance of success with Republicans in charge of both houses of Congress.

On Inauguration Day, President Trump rescinded many executive orders issued by President Biden, including one

(Executive Order 14084) on "Promoting the Arts, the Humanities, and Museum and Library Services." This executive order declared that "the arts, the humanities, and museum and library services are essential to the well-being, health, vitality, and democracy of the Nation" and called for federal investment for these institutions.

Project 2025

PRESIDENTIAL TRANSITION PROJECT

Secondly, it may be useful to study Project 2025, a 900-page presidential transition plan published by the conservative think tank Heritage Foundation in 2023 that lays out actions that conservatives should take in the first 180 days of an administration to “dismantle the administrative state” and “reform our federal government.” The report relies on an expansive theory of presidential power and outlines plans to place the entire executive branch under direct control of the president, eliminating the historical independence of the Department of Justice, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and other agencies, and replacing tens of thousands of nonpartisan career federal civil service workers with political appointees.

As a candidate, President Trump disavowed Project 2025, insisting that he had nothing to do with it and criticizing several of its policy goals. However, he has since staffed his administration with many of the document’s authors, including the director of the Office of Management and Budget and the chair of the Federal Communications Commission. Consequently, it is important to recognize how these proposed changes could affect schools and libraries.

EDUCATION:

Most notably, Project 2025 argues that education should be left to the states and calls for the abolishment of the Department of Education, with its components either transferred to other agencies or terminated completely. It recommends that Title 1 funding for low-income students, which is one of the largest federal assistance programs for public schools in the country, be allowed to expire and replaced with block grants to states with no requirements that it be used for vulnerable students. These block grants would be completely phased out over ten years.

According to the Kentucky Department of Education, 931 of the state’s 1,484 public schools currently operate federal Title 1 programs. These schools have a high percentage of children from low-income families, and this funding is designed to help them meet state achievement standards.

In addition, the report makes the following recommendations:

- Rescind existing federal civil rights protections for LGBTQ+ students.
- Reduce federal funding for students with disabilities.
- Eliminate the Head Start program that promotes school readiness for young children from low-income families.
- Establish a nationwide school choice / voucher program that would allow parents to use public money to fund private and religious education.

PARENTAL RIGHTS AND CENSORSHIP:

In just the second paragraph of the foreword of the document, The Heritage Foundation President Kevin Roberts describes an America where “children suffer the toxic normalization of transgenderism with drag queens and *pornography invading their school libraries.*” He then argues that pornography has no claim to First Amendment rights and should be outlawed. “The people who produce and distribute it should be imprisoned. *Educators and public librarians who purvey it should be classed as registered sex offenders.* And telecommunications and technology firms that facilitate its spread should be shuttered” (emphasis mine). Of course, teachers and librarians are not providing pornography to children! Notably, this document expands the definition of pornography to include any discussions of gender identity, including any mentions of LGBTQ-related topics.

It is important to note that five states (Arkansas, Indiana, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Tennessee) have already passed legislation that would criminalize librarians who provide “obscene” or “harmful” materials to children. However, in December 2024, a federal judge struck down the sections of the Arkansas law that would have allowed for criminal charges against librarians and booksellers. Arkansas officials are currently appealing this ruling.

According to PEN America, which champions free expression, Project 2025 would “ramp up book banning, impose a greater climate of censorship and self-censorship on schools and college campuses, and silence educators and students – all on a national level.” In its chapter on education, Project 2025 focuses heavily on “parental rights” as part of an effort to ban books and topics for instruction, typically about race and LGBTQ issues.

HIGHER EDUCATION:

Project 2025 recommends:

- Banning any federal funds for the teaching of critical race theory, which too often is defined by any discussion of race and racism.
- Allowing states to replace the existing accreditation process of independent, nonpartisan accreditors with politically driven accreditors. These new accreditors could remove requirements that college and universities have libraries and librarians, for example.
- De-emphasizing liberal arts and research-based education in favor of workforce skills and technical education.
- Eliminating student loan income-based repayment plans and debt forgiveness for public-service workers.

Many of Project 2025’s recommendations would require Congressional approval, and with a narrow Republican majority in both the House and Senate, the most controversial ones might be



extremely difficult to enact into law. However, many can be enacted through executive orders, as we have seen in the flurry of orders signed by President Trump in the early days of his term.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Stay informed: Many organizations will be tracking and highlighting federal executive and legislative action related to libraries. Follow the social media accounts or sign up for alerts from groups like the American Library Association, EveryLibrary, PEN America, the National Education Association, and the American Civil Liberties Union, among others.
- The ALA has launched a new campaign called “Show Up for Our Libraries” that seeks to use the collective power of library advocates to influence policymakers. The site has tips on being

an advocate for libraries and is collecting stories from librarians about the impact and reach of their library.

- If possible, build relationships with your elected officials so you can highlight the work your library is doing in your community.
- Be prepared to contact your Members of Congress to advocate for and against legislation. If you can, provide examples of how it would affect your library and your community.
- Understand that many executive and legislative actions will face legal challenges and may never go into effect.
- Finally, remember that the vast majority of the public respect librarians and the work that we do!

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meet Jennifer Horne



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