

**United States Senate**  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

September 24, 2013

Susan Hildreth  
Director  
Institute of Museum and Library Services  
1800 M Street NW  
9<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Washington, DC 20036-5802

Dear Director Hildreth,

As we near the October 1<sup>st</sup> launch of health coverage enrollment options under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, several of my colleagues and I have expressed concerns that the Administration is inappropriately using taxpayer dollars across the agencies of government to promote the law.<sup>1</sup> For example, the Associated Press recently reported that spending from federal agencies such as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, as well as state governments in support of the law, could near \$700 million this year alone.<sup>2</sup>

Many Americans take strong objection to their tax dollars being used for slick ad campaigns to promote a law will increase their cost, and which a majority of Americans continue to oppose.<sup>3</sup> In this climate, I was dismayed to hear about the Institute of Museum and Library Services' (IMLS) efforts to promote the health overhaul. However, in June of this year, your agency announced a partnership with CMS in which librarians will be recruited across 17,000 of the nation's libraries to help patrons sign up for insurance under the new federal law.<sup>4</sup>

Based on IMLS's statements in the press, I realize you may argue your Institute it is merely taking steps to ensure librarians have connections to experts on the new law. But I was especially troubled that IMLS gave more than a quarter of a million taxpayer dollars to the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) for the sole purpose of creating an online toolkit and training webinars for librarians arming Americans with favorable information on the Affordable Care Act.<sup>5</sup> Given the legitimate policy concerns and clear cost increases this law has already thrust upon millions of consumers and taxpayers, one can hardly claim this effort is merely informative. In fact, the White House was apparently so struck by the helpfulness of these library efforts, that President Obama thanked the recent attendees at the American Library Association conference for their help in promoting the law.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.help.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/?id=1f89a699-90d8-4d88-b698-3dad4dc003e0>

<sup>2</sup> <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/marketing-obamacare-shaping-big-challenge>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.gallup.com/poll/163253/americans-wary-health-law-impact.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> [http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/U/US\\_HEALTH\\_OVERHAUL\\_LIBRARIES?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT&CTIME=2013-06-28-10-15-31](http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/U/US_HEALTH_OVERHAUL_LIBRARIES?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT&CTIME=2013-06-28-10-15-31)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.imls.gov/imls\\_and\\_centers\\_for\\_medicare\\_and\\_medicaid\\_services\\_to\\_partner\\_with\\_libraries.aspx](http://www.imls.gov/imls_and_centers_for_medicare_and_medicaid_services_to_partner_with_libraries.aspx)

<sup>6</sup> <http://washingtonexaminer.com/white-house-vetoes-public-seeing-obamas-thanks-to-librarians/article/2532672>

I have a great appreciation for the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and I applaud the culture of the library professionals who want to help equip Americans with information. However, in the age of Google, the actions by the American Library Association and IMLS seem more motivated by a desire to promote their own importance and visibility than they seem related to consumers' information needs.

While there is a distinction between providing information about a government program and advocacy for that program, based on Americans' rejection of the law and the taxpayer funding involved, in this instance the IMLS and the American Library Association crossed the line.

While some in the library profession may not agree with my assessment, something is wrong when the library community is so out of synch with the public that it feels it is necessary to engage in promoting a law that has already increased costs, reduced choices, and increased taxes for many Americans.

As a strong supporter of libraries, I urge the IMLS to reconsider these actions. Regardless of the good intentions to "help," this announcement risks undermining public support not just for their IMLS, but for community libraries more broadly. Today in so many American cities and communities, local public libraries function as a hub of learning and discovery. Efforts to "equip consumers with information" on any hotly-contested political topic could be misunderstood, but so much more so when politicians or the government is paying the tab. Americans should be able to ask their local librarian for help without wondering if he or she is pushing the latest government program or catering to the political flavor of the moment.

The public should be able to trust that the information they receive from their local library is free of political bias. Yet, at least once already, the Obama Administration proved it is willing to bend the cultural agencies of government toward its own political ends. In 2009, staff at the National Endowment for the Arts was caught trying to use local arts organizations to promote actively the Obama agenda.<sup>7</sup>

At a national level, now more than ever, it is vital the IMLS meticulously and judiciously uses whatever resources Congress gives it to assure that our nation's library community is furthering civic advancement and education, by encouraging literacy and learning. In recent years, the IMLS has seen a five percent cut to its annual budget. A wiser use of dollars would be to spend scarce resources on advancing the common culture that we all share, not on the political issues that divide us. I hope you will reconsider your current efforts and not take additional steps to use taxpayer dollars on promoting this unpopular and problematic law.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Coburn". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Tom Coburn, M.D.  
U.S. Senator

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<sup>7</sup> <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/culturemonster/2009/09/texas-senator-warns-obama-against-politicization-of-the-nea.html>