

From MLA National:

Please see the following article from today's Washington Post on open access. In spite of its tone that could cause concern, our Washington representatives believe that the open access provision in the House and Senate Labor-HHS appropriations bills is not in danger of being removed or modified. We hope to know the outcome of the bill which includes funding for NIH and NLM as well as the open access provision later today or tomorrow. The Conference Committee is scheduled to deliberate the bill today.

Open Access to Research Funded by U.S. Is at Issue

By Rick Weiss
Washington Post Staff Writer
Thursday, November 1, 2007; A02

A long-simmering debate over whether the results of government-funded research should be made freely available to the public could take a big step toward resolution as members of a House and Senate conference committee meet today to finalize the 2008 Department of Health and Human Services appropriations bill.

At issue is whether scientists funded by the National Institutes of Health be required to publish the results of their research solely in journals that promise to make the articles available free within a year after publication.

The idea is that consumers should not have to buy expensive scientific journal subscriptions -- or be subject to pricey per-page charges for nonsubscribers -- to see the results of research they have already paid for with their taxes.

Until now, repeated efforts to legislate such a mandate have failed under pressure from the well-heeled journal publishing industry and some nonprofit scientific societies whose educational activities are supported by the profits from journals that they publish.

But proponents -- including patient advocates, who want easy access to the latest biomedical findings, and cash-strapped libraries looking for ways to temper escalating subscription costs -- have parlayed their consumer-friendly "public access" message into legislative language that has made it into the Senate and House versions of the new HHS bill.

That has set the stage for a last-minute lobbying showdown.

"There's been loads of debate and discussion, and at last it's going forward," said Heather Joseph, executive director of the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition, a Washington-based library group. She has been a persistent

presence on Capitol Hill, making the case for open access.

Joseph and other supporters of the initiative have argued that subscription rolls would not plummet as a result of the requirement. Most journals contain plenty of research from non-NIH scientists, which would still be available only to subscribers, they say. And in any case, they contend, most scientists and libraries would not want to wait a year just to see research results free of charge.

They also point to the growing number of scientific journals that have switched to the open-access model, in which expenses are covered not by subscriptions but by fees charged to scientists whose work the journals publish. Such costs are usually covered by scientists' grant money.

Scientists assert that open access will speed innovation by making it easier for them to share and build on each other's findings.

"Congress recognizes that, in the Internet age, unimpeded access to publicly funded research results is essential for the advancement of science and public health," said NIH Director Elias A. Zerhouni.

A two-year-old policy encouraging, but not requiring, NIH-funded scientists.