

Statement by the Honorable Paul D. Tonko (D-NY)

“Federally Funded Research: Examining Public Access and Scholarly Publication Interests”  
A Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Investigations & Oversight  
House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank all of our witnesses for coming today to testify before the Subcommittee.

In 2010, this Committee adopted language that set the stage for enhancing public access to Federally-funded research. Since that time, two legislative proposals have emerged and have received the scientific communities’ attention.

At this point, I believe the language this Committee included in the reauthorization of the American Competes Act remains the best path forward.

We have two competing public interests at play in the open access discussion.

On the one hand, the taxpayers who provide support for research through grants provided by Federal science agencies have an interest in having the research they fund deliver maximum public benefit.

On the other hand, the public is not only interested in quantity. They want quality. The scientific publishing enterprise--working with the research community, academia, and the government traditionally has had an important role in ensuring that quality—through the management of the peer review process.

We are on the cusp of an information revolution. We hear about the impacts of this revolution on print media every day. Digital technologies are making it easier to produce, distribute, search, access, and archive information.

Scholars are embracing open access journals for their articles, and we have seen a series of schools follow Harvard faculty in establishing publically-accessible faculty archives of their publications.

More journals are looking to move to a business model based on author charges to remain viable with the move to open access. NIH's policy of making final submitted copies of manuscripts that result from NIH-funded research available on PubMed within 12 months of publication is also driving change among publishers.

The National Science Foundation and the Department of Energy – significant funders in all non-medical fields of science—are both working on pilot programs that embrace an open access policy.

With all these changes underway, it is hard to see how traditional publishers will be able to survive without significantly re-thinking their business model. This appears to be true for both for-profit and not-for-profit publishers.

So, what is the proper role for the government in this evolutionary process? Clearly, we need to ensure that the vital public interests in the U.S. research enterprise are served.

Any new system that emerges needs to facilitate data sharing and interoperability across fields and archives. In addition, it must provide for the long-term stewardship of the scientific record.

We need to consider the implications for federal grants of moving to new publishing business models including author-paid publication. Currently, federal grants help to support journal subscriptions through indirect costs on grants.

Can we rely on the current policy path, coupled to changing technology, emerging competition, and social norms among scholars to drive us steadily toward broader access to research results?

It is too soon to tell. The landscape is dynamic and Federal agencies have not yet completed their policy reviews and revisions. We are still waiting for the report we requested from OSTP.

If we proceed to a legislative approach, we may end by creating more problems than we solve. An abrupt end to the current system could drive some publishers out of existence. It could result in the loss of established journals and weaken professional scientific societies. These outcomes would be counterproductive to the goal of having high quality research widely published and disseminated.

How we produce, share, and preserve knowledge is on the edge of the greatest change in four centuries. There are many new opportunities for improvement and this is an exciting time. Transitions are always unsettling, but they offer a period for constructive experimentation.

I believe we should take the time to hear from all interested parties, encourage the Federal science agencies to move their efforts forward, and refrain at this time from prejudging the best outcome through prescriptive legislation.

We want to see the strongest possible system for sharing and preserving knowledge emerge from this transition period. I look forward to hearing the perspectives and concerns of our witnesses today and as this process moves forward.