

## Intellectual property

Inter- and intra-industry and organization conflicts remain significant in the fight over legislation intended to "update" the Copyright Act for the digital age. At this writing, it appears that a third attempt by the House Subcommittee on Courts and Intellectual Property to consider and vote on HR 2441, the administration's "White Paper" package of proposals, may also be postponed indefinitely. Most controversial in the bill are provisions that could, according to many in libraries, education, and business, prevent the manufacture, import, and distribution of devices, VCRs, and even computers needed to prevent the exercise of fair use privileges.

Negotiations also have stalled over how to assign liability for copyright infringement by the users of computer systems, which include not only popular commercial services, like America Online, but computer systems operated by libraries and schools as well.

Latest word from Washington is that even if the House Subcommittee acts on this increasingly controversial package soon, its prospects for consideration by the full House remain speculative at best. Most close to the issue also would say that it is unlikely a bill like this would reach the President's desk this late in the 104th Congress.

Academic library and higher education supporters interested in participating in the ongoing policy debate should call and fax members of the House Subcommittee on Courts and Intellectual Property who represent them or their institutions to say that HR 2441 just is not ready for Congressional consideration if education and fair use are to be adequately protected and potentially expanded in a digital age. Similar contact with other members of the full House Judiciary Committee who are not on the subcommittee would also be useful. ALA has taken a very active role in establishing the Digital Fu-

# Washington Hotline

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tures Coalition (DFC) to address critical intellectual property issues. It's a critical role because ALA is essentially the only voice for all types of libraries advocating for libraries and library users. The DFC Web site can be found at: <http://www.ari.net/dfc>.

## Government information

In early April, the Government Printing Office (GPO) released a draft report for the "Study to Identify Measures Necessary for a Successful Transition to a More Electronic Depository Library Program." After a 60-day public comment period, this study and strategic plan was submitted to Congress as a final report in early June. Public printer Michael DiMario initiated the study at Congressional direction in 1995 to examine the functions and services of the Federal Depository Library Program in a shift to a more electronic program.

This current study was the second report GPO has prepared on the transition to a substantially electronic depository program. The first report, released in December 1995, assumed a two-year transition to an almost entirely electronic program. When ALA President Betty Turock testified before the House Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee on March 6, she said a rapid shift to a predominantly electronic system at this time would undermine the significant progress already achieved by depository libraries and GPO in enhancing public access through electronic technologies.

GPO's recently released study responded to the concerns of librarians and others that the first transition plan was based on an overly ambitious time frame, and GPO is now recommending to Congress a five- to seven-year transition.

Although long supportive of a more electronic program, librarians have continuing concerns such as: shifting costs to libraries and the public; using appropriate formats for government publications; and long-term permanent access and preservation of electronic files for continuing use. ■

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