

From the Chair



ERIC, and NBII and NTIS, oh my! Thoughts on open access for Canada and the United States

In January at ALA's Midwinter meeting, many units of ALA were concerned about the ongoing and escalating problems with open access in Canada. As many of you know, Canada has recently engaged in open access initiatives such as the creation of Pub Med Central Canada, which has joined with the United States National Institutes of Health in providing open access databases for federal agency-sponsored research formerly only accessed through private journals. However, several recent Canadian government initiatives have worked in the opposite direction. Canadian government agency websites are disappearing at an alarming rate, and one source indicated the ultimate goal was to reduce to only six sites.

The reduction was described as "an economy move." Further, it was declared that materials would only remain online for two years, with no mention of archiving. Although several libraries have recently connected to the LOCKSS system, the ability to archive agencies' electronic materials has been severely curtailed. In addition, federal librarians are being restricted in their ability to connect with other libraries, and statements were made by government officials discouraging their participation in professional meetings—even on their own time—thus further reducing their ability to get information out.

At Midwinter, GODORT worked on a resolution asking responsible Canadian government agencies for restoration of possibly lost Canadian depository materials (we have about forty Canadian depositories in this country) and about considering of the economic impact that loss of access to Canadian government materials could have on the economy of the US border states that depend on nearby Canadian communities for commerce, and so on. During this process, GODORT garnered the support of the ALA International Relations Committee (IRC) and approached the Committee on Legislation. In the end, because of government protocol, it was decided to send a letter from

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Canadian government information.

Many librarians are viewing this Canadian debacle as concerned citizens viewing problems in another country removed from US concerns. But, Canada is not a police state. It has long followed the US lead in encouraging open access. And it partners with the United States on initiatives such as the aforementioned PubMed Central consortium. How did this happen to Canadian open access, and more importantly, can it happen here in the United States? You bet! It can happen, and it is happening.

The US Congress created a boon to open access by making it mandatory by law that all articles funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) dollars, American tax payer money, be released into an open access database, PubMed Central, after they had appeared in costly private academic journals. It was a hard fight and Congress resisted several attempts by publisher lobbyists to reverse the decision. As mentioned, PubMed Central is now an international consortium joined by PubMed Central Canada and Pub Med Central Great Britain. Building on this open access initiative, the Obama administration issued an executive order to create open access to articles funded by National Science Foundation (NSF) and several other large government agencies with extramural funding over \$100 million per year. Again, great progress in open access, although Congress will still have to pass this as a law to prevent it disappearing in a new administration. So far, this progress was a similar progression to Canada. In the meantime, over the last several years we have seen many more databases made available open access on

a complex amalgam of several databases from several government and private sources, disappeared so fast that no one, not even the complex University of North Texas digitization concern, could archive it all. During Midwinter, GODORT's Federal Documents Task Force organized a subcommittee to work on requesting development of a protocol for decommissioning databases, so that more databases such as the