

The 106th Congress has officially convened, although it is clear to everyone that the Senate is absorbed in the impeachment proceedings. At this writing, there are few specifics about the long-term agendas and related schedules for this session nor are all subcommittee assignments final in those committees dealing with library related issues. However, we know that intellectual property will continue to be one of the most important library-related issues to be addressed by the new Congress. Ongoing activities related to intellectual property and copyright continue to move forward as an outgrowth of various actions from the 105th Congress.

U.S. Copyright Office conducting hearings on distance education

To comply with a study required by the recently enacted Digital Millennium Copyright Act (PL 105-304), the Copyright Office has been seeking the views of parties interested in distance education, including representatives of copyright owners, nonprofit educational institutions, and nonprofit libraries and archives. At the study's conclusion in late April 1999, the Copyright Office will submit recommendations to Congress, possibly including the first major changes to the distance education section of the Copyright Act since 1976.

ALA, ACRL, and other library groups worked on joint testimony for the Washington, D.C., hearings on January 26 and 27. At this writing, other ACRL and ALA representatives have requested the opportunity to participate in the Chicago hearing on February 12. Another field hearing is scheduled for UCLA on February 10. At this writing, the ALA Washington Office had already received nearly three dozen copies of filings from universities nationwide. Written comments were to have been received at the Copyright Office by February 5. Watch for future reports about these proceedings.

CONFU final report available

The complete administrative history of Conference on Fair Use (CONFU) and a summary of the topics discussed is available online and in print format as the "Final Report to the Commissioner on the Conclusion of Conference on Fair Use." Prepared by staff to USPTO Commissioner Bruce A. Lehman, the report chronicles the CONFU process.

Single copies of the report, as well as the previously published interim report (December 1996), and the "Report on the Conclusion of the First Phase of Conference on Fair Use" (September 1997) may be obtained free of charge by sending or faxing a written request to: CONFU Report, c/o Richard Maulsby, Director, Office of Public Affairs, U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, Washington, D.C. 20231. Fax: (703) 308-5258. The reports are also available online at <http://www.uspto.gov/web/offices/dcom/olia/confu/>.

CONFU was initiated in the fall of 1994 under the auspices of the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO). Its purpose was to facilitate informal discussions regarding the parameters of fair use in the educational and library environments among copyright proprietors and members of the information user community.

Over the last four years, representatives of more than four dozen organizations narrowed nearly two dozen possible guideline topics down to three: digital images, distance learning, and educational multimedia materials. While CONFU was ultimately judged to be a useful communication vehicle, none of the drafts circulated received sufficiently wide support in both the public and private sectors to justify their submission to Congress for inclusion in appropriate legislative history.

For more on the position taken on the proposed CONFU guidelines by ALA in concert with more than a dozen other national library and educational organizations, see the May 1997 CONFU Joint Statement at <http://www.ala.org/washoff/confu.html>. ■