July 9, 2010

Dear Representatives Issa and Maloney:

On behalf of the American Anthropological Association (AAA), I want to express my appreciation to you for your June 28, 2010 letter to the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) regarding the formulation of public access policies for science and technology funding agencies across the federal government. As a non-profit association that is dependent upon subscription income to finance the publication of our 22 peer reviewed scholarly journals, we share your concerns about policies that will mandate free public access and undermine the financial stability of these journals.

Mandated free access will be detrimental to all authors, readers, and publishers of society journals, particularly those of the social sciences. Authors in the social sciences and humanities do not have the same ability to “pay to publish” as their science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) counterparts. Publishing costs in social science and humanities journals are significantly higher than in STEM journals, due to extended article length and a more robust peer-review process. Publishing costs in social science journals average $526 per page, more than double the average $226 per page cost of STEM journals.

Adopting a policy such as the OSTP suggests will irreparably damage society journals and researchers. STEM research is frequent and fast-paced; social sciences and humanities research is not. STEM content becomes outdated quickly, so after a short period, subscriptions do not yield much income. However, research in the social sciences and humanities remains relevant for many years, providing subscription income that our publications rely upon. Without alternative sources of income, authors will be unable to publish their findings, publishers will have nothing to publish, and OSTP will have nothing to make public.
The AAA appreciates your continued advocacy for a common-sense public access policy. If we can be of any assistance to you in advancing this issue, please contact Mr. Damon Dozier, AAA’s Director of Public Affairs. He can be reached at (703) 528-1902 extension 1163 or ddozier@aaanet.org.

Sincerely,

William E. Davis, III
Executive Director