

# editorial

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## In appreciation of page charges

In this issue's State and Society (page 103) we report on the controversy over the US Postal Service's recent ruling that papers appearing in scientific journals for which authors had paid page charges must be labelled as "advertisements" and that the journals would be charged a higher postal rate. This issue has now been resolved to the extent that the Postal Service has agreed that papers in journals for which the page charge is non-obligatory will not be considered advertising. Since this is the situation for all journals published by the American Institute of Physics, we can feel relieved that our system of primary journals based on page charges is not going to be jeopardized by an administrative interpretation.

The whole episode has inspired a new appreciation of how successful our page-charge system has proved to be and how impossible it would be for the physics community to do without it. The basic page charge for journals published by AIP is adjusted to cover the actual "front-end" costs (composition, copy editing, editorial management and gratis reprints) of publishing the journal as determined by a detailed accounting. The two-track system (in which non-honored pages are subject to delay) ensures that no author will be turned away because he lacks funds to cover his page charges. Through the years the physics community has given its whole-hearted support to this means of funding the primary-journal system. AIP Treasurer Gerald Gilbert finds that there is minimal difficulty in collecting payments for page charges—less than 1% of all page-charge commitments prove to be uncollectible. A key endorsement of the page-charge system came in 1964, and again in 1972, when the Federal government itself ruled that it would assume the page-charge obligations of authors employed by or under contract to Federal agencies.

In our age of built-in inflation, the page-charge rate has remained almost constant. This has been made possible through the savings in production costs realized with AIP's typewriter-composition procedures. AIP hopes to continue to hold the line by installing full-text computer composition, which should achieve even lower costs.

A comparison of subscription prices reveals that journals supported by page charges can offer subscriptions at much lower prices (factor of five in some cases) than can non-page-charge journals. The lower subscription price, of course, means a much

wider dissemination of the journal to individuals and libraries.

To return to the problem with the Postal Service ruling, some scientific journals, such as the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, have mandatory page charges and under the law have no alternative but to identify their authors' papers as "advertisements." This is clearly not the intent of Congress (which just last year exempted college catalogs from this requirement). We urge the new Congress to replace the present law, which can be interpreted to equate scientific articles with commercial advertising, with a new law that guarantees the authors of scientific papers in journals with page charges the respect and consideration they rightly deserve.

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