Follow-up email exchange on UW research exemption

Bill Lueders’ email to William Barker, 3:51 pm, Feb. 16, 2015:

With regard to the example you gave of a records request from USA Today taking most of a staff person's time for three and a half months, I have some questions:

Isn't it true that NIH guidelines stipulate that these records must be made public on request, so the proposed change in the state's open records law will not in any way ease the burden on the UW to provide them? Here's the relevant section:

Section IV-B-2-a-(7): "Upon request, the institution shall make available to the public all Institutional Biosafety Committee meeting minutes and any documents submitted to or received from funding agencies which the latter are required to make available to the public..."

(http://1.usa.gov/ZHlDc0)

Also, as for this task taking three and a half months, isn't this at least in part indicative of problems with how the UW maintains this information? What follows is from numbered P. 5 of a Q&A from NIH. The USA Today reporter also told me that “other universities keep these records in a way so they can be posted online without months of redactions.”

The NIH has suggested posting these online: There are, however, multiple ways to make minutes available that are relatively unburdensome to both the institution and the requestor. Minutes can be sent by U.S. mail, email or made available on the institution’s Web site (either openly, or through special access provided to requestors only).

I thought I should give you the opportunity to respond. Let me know if you care to.
Barker reply, 4:53 p.m., Feb. 16, 2015

Hi Bill, The burden associated with requests involves a single person getting pulled off of their regular full time job. As I pointed out in my mail, the employee had to work with 33 principal investigators (Pis) and the minutes involving 45 protocols. Each of those PIs had to review minutes and help determine what needed to be redacted. Recent studies have shown that PIs spend 42% of their time allotted to research in regulatory compliance and associated burden. This further erodes their capability to do their research.

And of course, you know well that a research program seen as controversial gets targeted by *multiple* records requests. In such cases, the open records laws are used as a tactic to disrupt the research. It has little to do with the public’s right to know. B-

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