
Science Legislation

Obituary: National Science Foundation, 1946

Howard A. Meyerhoff

At noon, 19 July 1946, The National Science Foundation was pronounced dead by the surgical staff of the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce. The death was a homicide!

Readers of *Science* are familiar with the promising career of the deceased, and many will mourn this untimely and unnatural passing, for the killing was done, not by politicians, but by scientists. Friends of S. 1850 may find a little—but very little—consolation in the fact that HR 6448, the cause of S. 1850's death, died at the same time.

The events preceding the tragedy may be briefly recounted: Following passage of S. 1850 in the Senate on 3 July by a vote of 48 to 18, the bill was referred to the Subcommittee on Public Health in the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce. The bill came to this subcommittee solely because the sponsor of HR 6448 had arranged to have his bill referred to the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, where, presumably, it would be in "friendly" hands. This subcommittee was the only one within the larger committee that had experience with anything akin to science, and so it was charged with the responsibility of studying and reporting on the competing National Science Foundation bills.

In the face of this responsibility, J. Percy Priest, chairman of the Subcommittee on Public Health, decamped to direct affairs connected with his forthcoming campaign for re-election in his home district in Tennessee. The National Science Foundation bills were left with his fellow committeeman, Alfred Bulwinkle of North Carolina. On 16 July, under Representative Bulwinkle's guidance, the Subcommittee reported out a slightly modified version of HR 6448.

The subcommittee report went to the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce Friday, 19 July. Under the questioning of the full committee, the subcommittee could not make a case for HR 6448, nor had it the background to defend the rejection of the Senate Bill. Lacking the bases for intelligent decision the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce took the only course of action available to it: The bills were tabled "because the legislation was too complicated and important" for action with the information at hand.

Offhand, Alfred Bulwinkle, Percy Priest, and the other members of the Subcommittee on Public Health might be judged culpable, but it would be unfair to place the onus of the Foundation's death upon them. It must be placed upon the shoulders of those who drafted and introduced the Mills Bill, HR 6448, into the House. Let no one be so naive as to suppose that this was Representative Mills. The record establishes the responsibility. In the report of the hearings of 28 and 29 May, 1946, on HR 6448 the following excerpts are illuminating:

On page 16, Representative Mills states: "The recommendations contained in the Bush report *Science, the Endless Frontier* became the basis for a bill (HR 3852) which I introduced in the House on July 19, 1945. A companion bill (S. 1285) was introduced by Senator Magnuson. . . . After carefully studying the provisions of S. 1850 I came to the conclusion that H.R. 3852 . . . was a better bill for most of the problems involved than S. 1850, although there were a few points mentioned in the Senate hearings that had not been covered in HR 3852. Therefore, I revised my original bill to include some of these points." And further, on page 17, "it is appropriate for the Congress to review the situation at this time to determine whether it is in the public interest to establish an organization designed to operate in the same manner and in a comparable field as OSRD."

On page 55 Homer W. Smith states: "As you know, the Magnuson Bill (S. 1285) was drawn up in close consultation with Dr. Bush."

On page 50, Vannevar Bush observes: "I think this piece of legislation you have before you, HR 6448, is an excellently drawn piece of legislation, that it has been very carefully prepared . . .," and he proceeds to demonstrate that it incorporates all of his own personal convictions on the organization of a National Science Foundation.

At least two of the witnesses who appeared at the hearings on HR 6448 were persuaded to testify on the strength of an assertion that S. 1850 would not be passed by the Senate, and that the introduction of a new bill in the House was the only hope of salvaging the National Science Foundation in the 79th Congress.

It is possible that Dr. Bush was similarly misled, but the fact remains that he must personally assume the burden of responsibility for the introduction of a bill for which his own representative arranged the hearings on 28 May. Congressman Mills had as much to do with the revision of HR 3852 into HR 6448 as he had to do with the drafting of S. 1285—HR 3852, which, as the testimony shows, was next to nothing.

Many scientists had voiced their objection to having a peace-time Foundation created in the image of the Office of Scientific Research and Development. But regardless of the motives which prompted the introduction of HR 6448 it was unilateral action betraying the democratic principles upon which the compromises in S. 1850 were worked out in conference. Furthermore, HR 6448 violated practical political procedure in proposing a nine-man, part-time board of scientists to administer the affairs and the millions of the National Science Foundation. Many Congressmen have voiced serious objections to this type of adminis-

tration, and in his testimony (p. 27) Secretary of War Patterson says "I believe in agencies with a single administrator to take the full responsibility for the performance of the Government agency . . . rather than division of responsibility among the members of a board." In view of the fact that "a White House spokesman" had predicted a presidential veto for science legislation creating this type of administration, insistence on a part-time board was something less than astute.

In content, in timing, in complete misjudgment of the strength of S. 1850, HR 6448 was a political blunder which has cost science at least a year of life for the National Science Foundation. Every scientist has the right to his convictions, but no scientist—no group of scientists, whether a majority or minority—has the right to impose its convictions at this cost. The moral of 19 July is simple: *Only in a reasonable show of unity, achieved by some compromise, can scientists expect political results.*

Association Affairs

Scientific Exhibits

113th Meeting, Boston, 26-31 December 1946

The Committee on Exhibits for the Boston Meeting has announced the availability of space for scientific exhibits together with application procedures. The scientific exhibits will be housed with the technical exhibits in the First Corps Cadet Armory, which is located opposite the AAAS headquarters, Hotel Statler.

It is the purpose of the Committee to arrange a wide variety of selected exhibits which will (1) portray scientific advances in the various fields of science; (2) show new techniques and apparatus usable in the laboratory or in classroom teaching; (3) summarize research in a given field. The Committee feels that personal demonstration is the most important single factor for a successful scientific exhibit. Both the visiting scientists and the demonstrator benefit from such a presentation. Originality in planning the exhibit is encouraged; charts, drawings, transparencies, specimens, and other materials can be shown in a variety of ways, using light and color judiciously. A large expenditure of money is not necessary.

In general, the space allocated will be 6 feet deep

and 10 feet wide. A 10-inch shelf at table height runs around the three closed sides of the booth. The backdrop is of plywood and can be used for hanging or tacking materials. The Committee in its discretion may allocate a greater width than 10 feet. Booths, including illumination, necessary electrical outlets, two chairs, uniform name signs, and general service, are furnished to exhibitors without charge. The exhibitors pay the expense of the preparation, transportation, and installation of their exhibits. Special construction in the booth, extra tables, chairs, or other furniture can be obtained at regular rates from the decorating firm. Application forms for scientific exhibit space may be obtained from: Theo. J. Christensen, Director of the Science Exhibition, AAAS, Massachusetts and Nebraska Avenues, N.W., Washington 16, D. C.

Those who are interested in exhibiting should request forms immediately. The closing date for applications will be 15 September 1946. Applications will be acted on by the Committee as soon as possible after that date and notification sent to exhibitors.