



Proposed Congressional Committee on Science

LAST year Representative Carl Hinshaw (Republican, California) introduced into the House of Representatives a resolution (H.J. Res. 166) which called for the creation of a Joint Committee on Science. Purpose of the committee would be "to promote a better understanding of the actual and potential impact of science upon public affairs, including human and natural resources, interstate and foreign commerce, relations with foreign nations, the common defense and security, and the national health, prosperity, and welfare." In order to accomplish these ends, the committee would "endeavor to keep itself informed with respect to, and bring to the notice of Members of the Congress, the results of scientific research and technical development which bear upon public affairs, and the problems being encountered in maintaining in the United States a scientific and technical effort of outstanding quality and accomplishment."

The committee would have 14 appointed members, seven from each house, plus any other members of the Senate or House of Representatives who wished to become members. The 14 appointed members would constitute a steering group of the committee and would plan committee activities and elect committee officers. At least once a year the committee would meet with the National Science Board of the National Science Foundation.

The committee would be authorized to utilize the services and facilities of the National Science Foundation and, with consent of the director or head, the facilities of any other department or agency of the executive branch of the government. Moreover, the committee would be authorized to accept the voluntary assistance of any private individual or organization.

The committee would serve somewhat the same functions as are performed in the United Kingdom by the

British Parliamentary and Scientific Committee. It could provide direct liaison between Congress and the world of science, and within Congress would be a center of information concerning the results of scientific endeavor and the problems encountered in maintaining a high quality of scientific work in the country.

The general welfare of the nation has come to depend so greatly upon scientific work, and scientific progress has come to depend so greatly upon government support and understanding that good communication between science and government is essential. Since the end of World War II the executive branch of the government has in several ways shown official recognition of the importance of scientific-governmental collaboration; the report of the Steelman Committee, the scientific liaison activities of the Department of State, the Interdepartmental Committee on Scientific Research and Development, and the National Science Foundation are the best known examples. Mr. Hinshaw's resolution is the first concrete move toward giving the legislative branch better and more direct contact with scientific thinking and problems.

It seems reasonable to expect that Congress will enact legislation along the lines of Mr. Hinshaw's resolution. But when is uncertain. The resolution is relatively noncontroversial, so strong opposition is unlikely. On the other hand the amount of support is still unknown. The resolution was introduced on 3 February 1953 and referred to the Committee on Rules. And there it rests, waiting for members of that committee to decide whether or not they want to take action on it. Mr. Hinshaw has received a number of supporting letters from individuals and scientific organizations, but on the whole the resolution has not attracted a great deal of attention. So it is not yet known how much backing the proposal will have from other members of Congress, from the executive branch of the government, or from scientists themselves.

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