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## Fare Enough

May a government scientist who is invited to attend a scientific program of public interest accept travel and related expenses from a private non-profit organization? We are assuming that participation in the program by the government scientist will contribute to his own scientific welfare, to that of his department, and to that of the other participants. We also assume that the program is taking place during the scientist's working months. Because of decisions by the General Accounting Office which were based on a conflict of interest law put on the books in 1948, the Government's answer until recently was no. Exceptions occurred only when there was specific legislative authority for a particular department. But, now, thanks in good part to efforts by the American Geological Institute, the answer is yes. Section 19 of the Government Employees Training Act, which the President recently signed into law, provides exemptions for scientists from the 1948 law. In fact, appropriate exemptions are provided for all federal employees.

An experience in 1957 by two scientists in the U.S. Geological Survey illustrates some of the undesirable consequences of the decisions based on the earlier law by the General Accounting Office. The scientists were invited to participate in the Distinguished Lecture Tour of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists. In the course of about a month, the tour would give them the opportunity to exchange ideas in many parts of the country with members of interested affiliated societies and universities. The scientists were to be reimbursed for their travel expenses by the various groups that benefited from the tour. But, as a result of the decisions, one of the scientists was unable to go, while the other did so but at personal sacrifice, since he went on leave in order to be able to accept travel expenses.

The people in the General Accounting Office, however, are not the villains of the piece. As a matter of fact, there are no villains, only a certain amount of misunderstanding. The General Accounting Office people held that, under the law, their decisions were the only ones possible. If private organizations were to be permitted to pick up the tab for government scientists, they said, then corrective legislation was required. In testimony before the House Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, Ralph E. Ramsey, associate general counsel of the General Accounting Office, brought the need for this legislation to the attention of Congress. He said of his office, "... we would be inclined to agree that the nonprofit scientific organization which asks for the attendance of a known authority in the Government to speak to the organization should be allowed, if it wishes, to help pay his travel expenses. . . ."

Bringing the provisions of the Government Employees Training Act down to cases poses several problems that still must be worked out. The act says that payments may be made "to the extent authorized by regulation of the President." The Bureau of Programs and Standards of the Civil Service Commission is now doing staff work on these regulations. One problem the bureau faces is the situation in which modest Government funds and more generous amounts from private sources may both be available for the same trip. May the latter be used to supplement the former? A second problem is to find some formula for distinguishing between those organizations from which it is proper to accept expenses and those from which it is not. We should not be very enthusiastic about government workers' accepting funds from a foundation, however disinterested, set up by a firm that advertised a product capable of growing hair on a golf ball, especially if the funds were earmarked for personnel in the Food and Drug Administration.—J.T.