

Letters

Fountain Committee Report

I do not believe that anyone who has carefully and objectively read the Government Operations Committee's report (*The Administration of Research Grants in the Public Health Service*) could agree with the Publisher of *Science* (Editorial, 10 Nov.) that "it raises no new policy issues and it beclouds some of the most fundamental problems in the relations of the federal government to its grantees." On the contrary, the report deals with many policy issues which, to my knowledge, have not been publicly examined by the Congress or by the appropriate officials in the Executive Branch, and which are basic to a sound and viable relationship between the federal government and institutions which receive support for biomedical research.

Science is to be commended for making it perfectly clear that the editorial represents Wolfle's personal views, not those of the AAAS. Our report, on the other hand, represents the unanimous views of the House committee which has been assigned the responsibility for studying the operations of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, including the Public Health Service. As such, it would be unfortunate if the scientific community did not understand that the report reflects the concerns of a cross section of the Congress.

Among the important policy issues examined in the report are the following: (i) whether it is in the national interest to use public funds for the support of research projects that are rated lower than good quality; (ii) whether it is advisable for NIH to enter into agreements to pay a large share of the total operating expenses of private research institutions, thereby removing substantial amounts of project funds from the competitive pool and project applications from evaluation by PHS scientific review committees; (iii) the need for adequate controls to prevent administrative agencies from launching new grant programs without

clear statutory authority, without formulating clear program objectives and policies, and without giving all qualified institutions an equal opportunity to compete for the available funds; (iv) the need to clarify the respective responsibilities of the Public Health Service, the National Science Foundation, and the Office of Education with respect to programs designed to develop or improve the capabilities and resources of educational institutions in the biomedical sciences; (v) the need to determine national goals and priorities with respect to helping already good schools achieve "excellence" as compared with aiding the nation's weaker educational institutions through the use of development-type grants; (vi) the need to modify the policies of the general research support and related institutional grant programs which favor research over educational institutions and discriminate against the less affluent schools; and (vii) the need for institutions to improve their ability to manage grant funds effectively and responsibly if they are to be given greater discretion in administering federal research money.

Wolfle confuses the issue when he says the desirability of institutional grants has been agreed upon. In actuality, the Congress has authorized NIH and the Public Health Service to make only one particular type of institutional grant—for general research support. One of the principal purposes of our report is to call attention to the manner in which NIH has initiated additional types of institutional programs and to examine the policy implications of those actions. The point is not that institutional forms of support are good or bad, but rather that their purposes and requirements for entitlement must be carefully worked out in a legitimate and responsible way.

Wolfle charges that the report places management controls ahead of scientific achievement. This is untrue. The committee has consistently taken the position that good management is essential for, not in conflict with, program effectiveness. Excellence is required in

both the scientific and the administrative aspects of research support.

Far from differing with the NIH director's view that the selection of good men and good ideas is the key to program productivity, the committee maintains that only good research should be supported and, further, that the integrity of the system for selecting projects on a merit basis should not be undermined.

It is unfortunate that the committee had to issue a very critical report. If NIH and PHS had earnestly sought to correct their acknowledged administrative shortcomings and to strengthen their management, the report would not have been necessary.

Unquestionably the Publisher of *Science* has a perfect right to express his opinions in an editorial. However, he would have placed his readers in a better position to assess the objectivity of his views if he had disclosed that he was a member of the advisory council that approved the initial Health Sciences Advancement awards which were severely criticized in the report. I might also note that the verbatim record of the council meetings does not show Wolfle among those members who questioned the propriety of awarding grants to a few handpicked schools, instead of giving all eligible institutions equal access to public funds.

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Common English, Please!

Since exactness is a scientific virtue, Reed makes a valid complaint when he deplores vagueness in identification of species in experimental animals (Letters, 25 Aug.). But I hope the editors will not go so far as to encourage authors of reports to drop the occasional common English terms which tell people in other disciplines (physics, for example) whether the critter under investigation is a monkey, a mouse, tarantula, or a protozoan. I cannot be alone among the old-timers who joined AAAS believing that it represented all the sciences. We've been heartened by the recent broad statesmanlike coverage in editorials, articles, and News and Comment—but the reports! Some months ago I began circling the words I didn't know. Then I