

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

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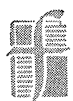
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switched to circling those I *did* know without recourse to an unabridged dictionary. Time after time I came up with only articles, prepositions, relative pronouns, auxiliary verbs, and a few modifiers such as "only" and "many." But for substantives, it was the old parlor game of "animal, vegetable, or mineral?"

The prize example was a description of experiments which my etymological research revealed hinged on the twitching of a cat's whiskers. I'm a cat lover; I recognized "felis," but I had to look up a dozen words to learn what had been done to puss and how she reacted. Why can't the editors, recognizing the broad base of *Science*, take on the task of interjecting, perhaps in the introductory abstract, an aside such as (Cat to you—Ed.)? This is not a frivolous suggestion. Every discipline has its own vocabulary, not to say jargon. An interdisciplinary magazine has a responsibility to make these disciplines somewhat more intelligible to each other.

The situation becomes serious now that the annual membership fee is to be raised. Why should a nuclear physicist, physical chemist, or mathematician pay the difference to help a biological scientist get into print with a report in which he cannot understand one word out of four? (Immunologists may well feel the same way about solid-state physics!)

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Disenfranchised AAAS Membership

The section entitled "Election of AAAS officers," (29 Sept., p. 1594) gives the initial impression that there is an election in which the membership of the AAAS is somehow involved. Yet a reading of the described electoral procedure reveals that only council members may vote, or in fact, nominate candidates. Since council members are themselves not elected by the membership, it is clear that ordinary AAAS members do not participate in this election at all. Why, therefore, is this disenfranchised membership given such detail about the nominees?

It seems to me that either this material might be omitted from *Science*, or the members of the AAAS ought to be given some direct share in the election. How about permitting mem-

bers to nominate officers upon suitable petition signed by, let us say, 100 members? Or how about having several "at-large" council members elected directly by the membership?

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Recorded Hearsay

Nelson's comments entitled "Privacy: how much need you tell a visiting federal investigator?" (29 Sept., p. 1539) moves me to relate my policy with regard to security investigators.

In 1941 an FBI agent (or was it a CSC agent?) asked me my evaluation of a student who was being considered for a research position in a federal military unit. I replied to his questions at some length, being rather flattered as a fledgling instructor that the government was seeking my advice! Incidentally, the student did get the position. In 1952, the same investigating agency sought me out to ask if I still agreed with the statements I had made over a decade before. I immediately asked what their record showed I had said in 1941. The agent explained that this was confidential information and that he was not at liberty to show it to me or to make any comments on it. Of course I told him that his inquiry was absurd. How could anyone comment on the veracity of a transcript of notes made by someone else a decade ago (who, at that time may or may not have recorded accurately my oral statements) without being given the opportunity to study the transcript.

Since that time when an FBI or CSC agent inquires my opinion or evaluation of a student or colleague, I explain that I will reply in writing to the questions he wishes to write out. If he agrees, I give him my reply and keep two carbon copies, one of which I generally send to the person in question. In this way I can be assured that the earlier incident will never happen to me again. Occasionally an agent will refuse to submit questions in this manner, saying that this defeats the purpose of the interview and the value of the results. Other agents comply with my requirements.

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