of a vehicle as a desirable feature for which they are willing to pay very much."

Authors of several government reports on the pollution problem support these views. A panel headed by Richard S. Morse of M.I.T., in a study written last year for the Department of Commerce,* recommended that the government support research and development of steam cars. Another report, recently sent to Congress by HEW's National Center for Air Pollution Control, also saw a need for federal support of steam cars and other low-pollutant vehicles. Irwin Auerbach, chief of the legislative section of the Air Pollution Center, told *Science* that "it's pretty clear that some government effort is necessary at least to supplement the activities of industry." He said that his office was examining two studies—one on electric cars and one on steam cars—that it had contracted for, and would then try to determine what role the government should play in steam car research and development. The Center's report to Congress acknowledged that steam cars still faced "significant cost and engineering problems," but said that they "may hold the greatest promise for achieving the low-pollutant levels that will be necessary" in this country in the near future.

At least one congressman—Representative Richard L. Ottinger (D–N.Y.)—plans to push hard for federal subsidies of steam car research and development. He also plans to introduce a bill that would have the government purchase steam vehicles for use by federal agencies.

In the past, Congress has generously provided money for projects considered necessary to the defense of the country. This is why the government took such an active role in the development of the aircraft industry. Congress has been much more wary of supporting projects that are not defense oriented. There have been exceptions, prominent among them being agriculture and health-related activities. But, in most nondefense cases, the government has not been in direct competition with corporations conducting research along similar lines, as it would be if it supported steam car research and development.

—ANDREW JAMISON

* "The Automobile and Air Pollution: A Program for Progress," a report by the Panel on Electrically Powered Vehicles, chaired by Richard S. Morse, of M.I.T.'s Sloan School of Management. In two parts, available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. Part 1, 60¢; part 2, $1.

AAAS Names Environmental Group

A chairman and eight new members have been named to the AAAS Committee on Environmental Alteration, after months of difficulty in setting up the group. The committee will study a broad range of environmental problems.

Jack P. Ruina, vice president for special laboratories at M.I.T., is chairman of the committee. Other new members include Theodore C. Byerly, U.S. Department of Agriculture; John E. Cantlon, Michigan State University; William M. Capron, Brookings Institution; H. Jack Geiger, Tufts University School of Medicine; Jacob E. Goldman, Ford Motor Company Scientific Laboratory; Oscar Harkavy, Ford Foundation; Walter Modell, Cornell University College of Medicine; and Arthur M. Squires, City College of the City University of New York.

Barry Commoner, of Washington University, and Rene Dubos, of Rockefeller University, had been named to the committee earlier.

The origins of the new committee date back to the December 1966 AAAS annual meeting, when a resolution was offered calling for the AAAS to investigate the military use of chemical and biological agents in Vietnam. Substantial opposition to the resolution resulted in broadening it to include a study of all uses of such agents to modify the environment, whether peaceful or military. To implement this resolution, the AAAS, at its December 1967 annual meeting, established the Committee on Environmental Alteration.

The initial task of the committee was directed toward the Vietnam defoliation issue. The committee was to review a study of herbicide literature that was carried out by the Midwest Research Institute under contract with the Defense Department, as well as a review of that study by a National Academy of Sciences group. However, the AAAS review was delayed when two of four original appointees to the new committee resigned (*Science*, 23 Feb. 1968). Subsequently, the AAAS board decided to conduct the review itself with the help of specialists. The board expects to release a report on its review shortly. Meanwhile, the Committee on Environmental Alteration, divested of its responsibility for reviewing Vietnam defoliation, will set its own tasks at an initial meeting which has not yet been scheduled.—PHILIP M. BOFFEY

House Authorizes Study of Metric Conversion

Last week, nearly two centuries after Thomas Jefferson first tried to get the United States to adopt the metric system, the House passed a bill calling for a study of the problems and advantages of working on a metric measure. The House action, on a bill which has been stalled for years, was accompanied by a decision to eliminate the $500,000-appropriation that the House Science and Astronautics Committee had recommended for financing the first year of the study. As things now stand, the Commerce Department will finance the study out of general appropriations and it will be conducted by the National Bureau of Standards. Since the Senate passed a metric study bill last year, it is expected that the House bill will face no difficulty in that chamber.

The first of several metric-system-study bills was referred to the House Science and Astronautics Committee in 1959. Since that date, Great Britain has announced the beginning of a 10-year metric-system-conversion program, and 14 other countries have made similar decisions. India has completed its conversion and the Union of South Africa has announced similar intentions. New Zealand, Australia, and Canada—the only major countries in the world besides the United States that have not adopted the metric system—are all moving toward it.—M.M.