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A New Base for Political Support of Academic Science

Academic scientists generally find little to be cheerful about prospects for federal support of their research. Hostile congressional attitudes toward university-based science have surfaced. These may be seen in the discussion of the Mansfield Amendment.* They are also evidenced by the comparatively large drop in appropriations for the National Science Foundation.

The election had little effect on the composition of Congress, especially on that of the House of Representatives. The attitude of Richard Nixon toward academic research is not clear, but the executive branch can provide only such funds as Congress is willing to sanction. Thus the fate of federal support of university research rests largely in the hands of those who were responsible for the cuts of 1968. Prospects for federal programs now would be dark were not the potentially powerful organizations of higher education entering the picture.

Among the most politically potent of these is the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, which has representation in all the 50 states. Member institutions are particularly powerful in Nixon country, where they are generally the intellectual centers of their states. Alumni form the power structure, dominating many of the state legislatures. Officers of the universities, especially the presidents of the universities, are experienced in political maneuvering. They must defend their budgets before the legislatures. Many of the presidents have close relations with influential men in their communities, have access to the levers of power, and know how to operate them.

A decade ago, presidents of the state universities were not very friendly toward the federal support of research. The grants programs tended to enhance the power of the faculty at the expense of the administration. However, federal funds were useful, and subsequently additional programs of aid to higher education were inaugurated. As a result, administrators are giving more attention to Washington and have been acting in concert.

Two recent examples illustrate the political potentials of the Association acting together with other organizations in the field of higher education. In early October the U.S. Senate, in an uncharacteristic display of petulance, passed the Mansfield Amendment to the Defense Appropriation Bill. The instrument limited overhead on Department of Defense grants and contracts to 25 percent. The Association and allied organizations were able to respond quickly through their members. The Mansfield Amendment did not survive the House-Senate Conference.

Potentially more significant was the effort of the Association, together with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, in drafting the Miller Bill.† This legislation, when enacted and fully implemented, will have profound effects on academic research. In its present form the Miller Bill provides for an annual appropriation of \$150 million for institutional grants for the support of scientific research and the training of scientists. This appropriation is intended to supplement the present mechanisms. A recently issued report on hearings on the Miller Bill indicates a favorable consensus, including spokesmen of major educational organizations and such eminent scientists as Brooks, Handler, Haworth, Hornig, and Wiesner.

The old base for support of academic research has deteriorated. However, a new force is developing capable of stabilizing and strengthening a vital national effort.—PHILIP H. ABELSON

* *Congressional Record* 114, No. 163 (3 Oct. 1968), pp. A11963-71. † "Institutional Grants Bill H.R. 875," *Hearings before the Subcommittee on Science, Research, and Development of the Committee on Science and Astronautics, U.S. House of Representatives* (Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1968).