

Miller Bill Endorsed in Hearings, But Critics Muster

Crosscurrents are developing in the discussion of how to provide new forms of federal aid to higher education. In congressional hearings which ended last week, a bill to give a substantial boost to science education in the universities through a program of institutional grants won strong endorsement from witnesses representing higher education institutions of all kinds and from leaders of the scientific community. However, the priorities implied in the institutional-grant approach are currently being sharply questioned in influential quarters.

The institutional-grant principle is embodied in a bill identified with Representative George P. Miller (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Science and Astronautics Committee. The hearings completed last week on the "Miller Bill" were held before the space committee's subcommittee on science research and development, headed by Emilio Q. Daddario (D-Conn.). The Miller Bill in its present form calls for the distribution of some \$400 million a year on a formula grant basis (*Science*, 17 January 1969) and would be administered by the National Science Foundation.

At the hearings, Administration witnesses, including Presidential science adviser Lee A. DuBridge, took the general position that institutions of higher education face serious financial problems but that, until the Nixon Administration developed its own legislative plans, it could not support or oppose any particular measure.

Backing for institutional grants came from two ranking spokesmen for the scientific community, Frederick Seitz, president of the National Academy of Sciences, and Philip Handler, chairman of the National Science Board which governs NSF, who on 1 July will succeed Seitz as president of the National Academy.

Both Seitz and Handler urged modification of the prevailing project-grant system of research support. Seitz questioned certain aspects of the Miller Bill, but said he felt institutional grants would counter some of the fragmenting effects on institutions which the project-grant system causes. He also indicated that he thought institutional grants would help maintain "a broad distribution of creative science . . . throughout the country."

Handler in recent months has emerged as a strong advocate of varying the forms of federal support of science education and research. The National Science Board, in its first annual report, recently made detailed suggestions for changes in the pattern of grants. Voicing support of the Miller Bill, Handler emphasized that, if the bill were enacted, this should "occur in the context of a considered, agreed upon, total federal plan for the support of higher education."

No overt opposition to the Miller Bill was expressed in the hearings testimony, but opposition is strongly implied in the reports of groups with weighty credentials which have recently been looking at higher education with a view to recommending lines of action for future federal policy. The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, chaired by former University of California president Clark Kerr, in December issued a first report on the financing of higher education which put primary emphasis on educational opportunity and stressed direct financial aid to students who need it. A congruent atti-

tude is also to be found in the recommendations of a study carried out last year for the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) and bequeathed to the new Administration. The report, "Toward a Long-Range Plan for Federal Financial Support for Higher Education," was produced by a committee headed by HEW Assistant Secretary Alice Rivlin, which included Presidential science adviser Donald F. Hornig, NSF director Leland J. Haworth, and National Institutes of Health director Robert Q. Marston. Like the Carnegie report, the HEW planning study puts primary emphasis on both quality and equality in higher education.

Both sets of recommendations clearly rate direct aid to students as preferable to institutional grants in major new federal aid programs. In the government-agency testimony which came closest to outright opposition to the Miller Bill at the hearings, Office of Education official Peter Muirhead cited the Kerr and Rivlin reports as containing evidence for the view that the Miller Bill may have the wrong "priorities."

Politically more significant, however, may be the report of the Nixon task force on education, which submitted a broad range of recommendations on education policy. The document, like other task force reports, has not been released, but summaries of the report which have found their way into the education press indicate that the task force, chaired by Carnegie Corporation president Allen Pifer, opposes the institutional-grants approach. Reportedly, the task force feels an institutional-grants program could reopen the church-state issue, block effective national planning to meet problems in higher education, and result, in many cases, in university and college wage boosts without accompanying improvements in the quality of education. Proponents of the Miller Bill do, in fact, recognize that they must deal with formidable problems of "accountability."

Another potential difficulty for the Miller Bill, still unresolved, is the matter of congressional jurisdiction. The Miller Bill would put a major higher education aid bill under the wing of the Science and Astronautics Committee rather than the House Education and Labor Committee. Since no member of the House Education and Labor Committee was invited to testify or asked the committee for an opportunity to appear, the attitude of the members of Education and Labor has not been publicly tested, but it is known to be less than receptive.

Both Miller and Daddario seem to feel that the hearings enhanced the bill's chances to advance, and a new and improved version is likely to be drafted and introduced. The virtual unanimity of support from organized higher education was particularly encouraging to the bill's proponents. Such unanimity may be due in part to the desperation about finances that is increasingly being felt throughout higher education. The hearings can be said to have documented this sense of desperation for Congress and also to have provided a focus for a discussion of priorities for new legislation. In this sense the hearings represent progress, although most people would agree that the Miller Bill itself has a long way to go.—JOHN WALSH