Letters

Human Fetal Research

Pending federal legislation (H.R. 7724) may drastically curtail the use of aborted human fetal tissues for research purposes. It is still too early to determine the final impact of H.R. 7724, but in its present form it would temporarily ban the use of federal funds or facilities for studies "on any fetus" derived from therapeutic abortion. The phrase "on any fetus" could be interpreted to mean on any fetus maintained in a physiologically intact condition, or, more broadly, on any tissue sample removed from a therapeutically aborted fetus. If the second interpretation becomes law, many scientific projects dealing with human development would be adversely affected.

Because of the sensitive political nature of such legislation, it seems unlikely that senators or representatives will take strong public stands supporting fetal research, and it is thus conceivable that excessively restrictive legislation may be passed with a minimum of public notice. Persons interested in communicating their views to Senator E. Kennedy, Chairman of the Senate subcommittee on health, and to their own senators and representatives are urged to do so. In addition, we would be interested in communicating with individuals who could contribute written or oral testimony to a joint Senate-House committee in the event that such input from the scientific community seems appropriate.

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Atmospheric Research

During a 2-year leave of absence in 1969–1971, I was engaged by the National Science Foundation (NSF) as the scientific coordinator for the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR). The difficulties at NCAR are accurately displayed in the report by Nicholas Wade (News and Comment, 5 Oct., p. 36).

The problems at NCAR are not new and have been a concern of the NSF for 6 years or more. My task, and that of Clifford Murino, who preceded me, was to try to help NCAR modify their program so that it would be more compatible with university programs. However, our suggestions, and those of several earlier advisory committees, were not heeded. Fortunately, the report of the Joint Evaluation Committee appointed by the NSF and the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research (UCAR) was finally accepted by the UCAR-NCAR administration, and it is hoped that something will be gained from their exercise.

The morale of the NCAR staff is quite low at this time, and I trust that the UCAR board of trustees will be able to resolve the many difficulties and reestablish the laboratory as a vital part of the atmospheric science program.

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Nicholas Wade, in his report on the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR), states that "The Fate of Air Pollutants Study was poorly thought out in its original form and has since been scrapped." The initial project *proposal* was, in fact, poorly thought out. I am to some extent, though not exclusively, responsible for that. I am also responsible for a second proposal that has been praised by the few people who studied it, but it has apparently not been read by anyone in a position to make decisions. The study was "scrapped" only after it had died of malnutrition. Funds were never made available to carry out more than three pilot studies. The NCAR staff capable of conducting the final study have now all been fired. It appears that the three pilot studies will yield a dozen good, solid scientific papers. In this context, biased as I may be, I do not think that the study should be described as a failure.

As for the overall adverse judgment concerning the NCAR atmospheric chemistry program, my colleagues elsewhere who are chemists do not appear to concur. It is part of the "Greek tragedy" of NCAR that the meteorologists did not communicate with the chemists.

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Unemployment among Biologists

Constance Holden (News and Comment, 31 Aug., p. 831) reports on a survey conducted earlier in the year by the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) which showed a startlingly high rate of unemployment (6 percent) among biologists. This report aroused concern at the National Research Council, both because of the apparent dimensions of the unemployment problem and because of doubts regarding the interpretation of the data.

A reexamination of the data indicates that the reported unemployment rate was probably erroneous and that most of those who were unemployed and seeking jobs were students.

The AIBS survey was conducted early in 1973. Readers of several bioscience journals were asked to return a questionnaire printed in the magazine. Because the persons comprising the sample were self-selected, the survey was not based on a random sampling from a known population base. The question of employment was only one of several topics included in the questionnaire. Furthermore, because of the imprecise phrasing of the questions regarding employment status, it is difficult to compare the results directly with such figures as the national unemployment rate published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Scientists and engineers in all fields should coordinate their data collection and interpretation, so that they may gather data in terms that are reasonably comparable. In the case of the AIBS study, such comparability was not fully achieved, and the subsequent confusion over the results can be traced back to this problem.

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