

Letters

"Public" Input in Research

I reacted with only partial enthusiasm to Senator Edward M. Kennedy's views regarding "more public input in research" (News and Comment, 20 June, p. 1187). Apparently the Senator considers it elitist for scientists to seek to control the actual disposition of funds, with public authorities simply determining the global amounts. Moreover, there is some thought that he would like to have a commission rather like the one he sponsored for the protection of human subjects, but this time to consider scientific research generally.

Who could quarrel with the proposition that the public should scrutinize and control the way its money is spent or with the proposition that the public should have a say in controlling research with potentially harmful, not to say disastrous, results? But what might be the actual result of this kind of "public" oversight and control? Inevitably we will need at least one national commission and probably a whole bureau in one or more federal departments; each commission and bureau must have a staff reporting to the federal departments; research institutions may have to have their own oversight commissions and committees, each with staff; and, of course, since the staffs of these bureaus and committees will have plenty to do with day-to-day administration, special studies and the like will have to be contracted out to the usual gaggle of "soft-money" research organizations. Is it not a fair question to ask whether all of these people are indeed "the public" and whether they are more disinterested and responsible than the scientists who would actually be doing the research? How disinterested are they, when one considers that such bureaucracies and their contractors, once having been called into existence, will probably want to continue to exist? We must be careful to guard against the instinct to create a vast bureaucracy whenever a problem appears. We must be careful that people who want to do useful, interesting, or creative things are not put in the position where whatever they want to do can only be done after it has been cleared (following endless delays) by layers and layers of people, many of whom may not understand nor be able to do the work the creative person is seeking to do.

Of course the problems Senator Ken-

nedy adverts to exist and must be dealt with. It might be said that I have not given an alternative to Senator Kennedy's proposal. But then the Senator has not given a proposal. All we have are slogans and rhetoric, together with a great deal of experience to show what these slogans and rhetoric end up meaning in practice. I would wash these slogans and rhetoric in a very strong bath of what Oliver Wendell Holmes called "cynical acid."

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Control of Infectious Diseases among Rodent Stocks

Within the past year, each of us has been personally involved in an institutional outbreak of ectromelia (mousepox). The cost to investigators whose research required use of mice and the cost to each of the institutions in added personnel expenses for destruction of infected mice, for disinfection of equipment and premises, and for vaccination of remaining mouse stocks was very high. In each of these instances, the infection was introduced by shipment of mice either directly from a European laboratory or by a secondary shipment of mice recently received from Europe. Most important, in each instance the shipment was received without the knowledge of any central authority within the receiving institution.

Currently all major commercial North American mouse-breeding establishments monitor their stocks for ectromelia with the hemagglutination-inhibition test. All commercial institutions breeding mice under contract with the National Cancer Institute are required to vaccinate their breeding stocks with IHD-T strain of vaccinia virus to protect them from ectromelia infection. Serums of mice immunized with IHD-T strain do not react in the hemagglutination-inhibition test for ectromelia.

The probability of acquiring ectromelia infection is thus much greater from shipments of mice received from non-commercial breeders, especially if the shipment is requested and received without passing through adequate quarantine channels. The recommendations of Whitney (1) reflect the considered views of

microbiologists who have had personal experience with ectromelia infections, although many feel that there is a sharp limit to the confidence one should place in an accompanying health certificate. More specific and detailed recommendations concerning disease control in rodent stocks appear in the report (2) of a committee commissioned by the Institute of Laboratory Animal Resources, National Academy of Sciences-National Research Council. This report fully describes application of adequate quarantine measures and provides details of serologic and microbiological monitoring of animals during quarantine.

Other important infections conveyed from one institution to another by shipment of undefined animals include lymphocytic choriomeningitis (3), the mycoplasmal infections, and ecto- and endoparasitic infections.

This is an appeal to each investigator employing laboratory rodents to consider the possible consequences to his own research and to that of his associates when he unilaterally introduces undefined rodents to a shared animal facility. This communication is also intended to endorse stronger administrative control within biomedical institutions to prevent unauthorized introduction of undefined rodents.

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References

1. R. A. Whitney, *Science* **184**, 609 (1974).
2. Institute of Laboratory Animal Resources, Subcommittee on Procurement Standards for Defined Laboratory Rodents and Rabbits, *Procurement Specification (Contract Clause) IX. Defined Laboratory Rodents and Rabbits* (National Academy of Sciences-National Research Council, Washington, D.C., 1973).
3. J. Hotchin, E. Sikora, W. Kinch, A. Hinman, J. Woodall, *Science* **185**, 1173 (1974).

The Federal Purse

The editorial by Kingman Brewster (11 Apr., p. 105) on the "Coercive power of the federal purse" raises several questions but answers very few of them. There have no doubt been instances where government dollars have been used for vindictive or po-