

A National Science Foundation: 1950 Prospects

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SCIENTISTS HAVE AN IMMEDIATE OPPORTUNITY to help secure enactment of the National Science Foundation Act that Congress has been considering, in one form or another, for the last five years. Most of the differences over specific features have been compromised, and there is reasonable basis for the optimistic hope that 1950 can see the long campaign successfully ended with the actual establishment of a National Science Foundation. The achievement of that possibility rests partly upon the many scientists and other individuals who believe the Foundation should be created. They can help secure passage by letting members of the House of Representatives know, immediately and in volume, what they think of the bill now before the House.

The Senate has four times passed a Science Foundation bill, the House of Representatives once. The President has repeatedly urged Congress to create a National Science Foundation and did so most recently in his State of the Union and budget messages to Congress for 1950. Cabinet members, the Bureau of the Budget, the Office of Naval Research, and the Research and Development Board have all recommended it. So have individual scientists, associations of scientists, and the National Association of Manufacturers. Nearly everyone is in favor of establishing the Foundation, but so far not enough have agreed at the same time on the same bill to get a Foundation established in law.

In 1946 the Senate passed S. 1850 after long, detailed, and careful hearings. When that bill was sent to the House of Representatives it was allowed to die in committee, partly because the House members did not have time to study it adequately, partly because scientists themselves were sharply divided on the kind of Foundation they thought would best serve the country.

In 1947, when the Republicans took control of Congress, the Senate passed a Science Foundation bill which differed in a number of respects from the one they had passed the year before. It was passed later by the House of Representatives, but vetoed by President Truman because of his objections to some of its administrative features.

In 1948 the bill which had passed both houses of Congress the year before was modified to meet the

President's objections. Again it passed the Senate. But it died when the Rules Committee failed to give it a place on the House calendar.

In 1949, with the Democrats back in control of Congress, the same bill that the Senate had approved in 1948 was reintroduced and again passed. An essentially similar bill was introduced in the House, approved by the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, and again prevented by the Rules Committee from coming to vote.

Now it is 1950. The 81st Congress has returned for its second session and can again take up the National Science Foundation Act. On the Senate side nothing needs to be done immediately. S. 247, which passed the Senate on March 18, 1949, is still alive, waiting for similar action in the House and then signature by the President. In the House, H. R. 4846 has been approved by the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, recommended to the House as a whole, and is ready to be voted upon whenever the House takes it up. As this is written, the bill is still held up in the Rules Committee, but there are good indications that it need not be held there long. There are two possibilities for getting H. R. 4846 out of the Rules Committee and onto the floor of the House for vote. One, the normal channel, is for the Rules Committee to place it on the House calendar. Last year the Rules Committee refused to do that. Representative James Wadsworth of New York is generally credited with leadership in opposing release of the bill by the Rules Committee. His reason, he stated, was that "he was hesitant and others on the committee felt hesitant about taking on new financial commitments which the Foundation would require" (Washington City News Service press release of August 18, 1949). Since the October adjournment of Congress, however, it is reported that Representative Wadsworth has agreed to withdraw his opposition so that the bill can be voted upon by the House of Representatives.

If that fails, if the Rules Committee does not place the bill on the House calendar, there is another method of securing an opportunity for the House to vote on it. Representative Robert Crosser, chairman of the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, last year requested the House to take up the bill regardless of the Rules Committee's failure to release it. A request of this kind can be acted upon only on the second and

fourth Mondays of a month; and the House itself must agree that it is willing to consider the bill, even though the Rules Committee has not released it. Mr. Crosser was in Europe on the days last fall when the bill could be called up for vote under this procedure, and no one could substitute for him in this role. If the Rules Committee does not release the bill, this alternative method of getting it up for vote can be used.

When H. R. 4846 is voted upon by the House it will not be identical with the bill which the Senate has already approved. The two are similar in most respects, both to each other and to the bills that were considered in 1948, but there are several distinctions between the House and Senate versions.

H. R. 4846 is a better-written bill in its details than S. 247. The various sections are more logically arranged, and the wording is more precise in a number of spots. For example, where the Senate bill speaks only of the "Foundation," the House Bill states that "The Foundation shall consist of a National Science Board (hereinafter referred to as the Board) and a Director." In a number of later sections H. R. 4846 differentiates more clearly than does the Senate bill between the responsibilities of the board and those of the director. Or, for a more amusing example, the Senate version states that arrangements with individuals or agencies in other countries "shall be exercised in such manner as is consistent with the foreign policy objectives of the United States as determined by the Secretary of State after consultation with the Director." The House version is reworded to remove the implication that the Secretary of State must confer with the director of the National Science Foundation in order to determine our foreign policy objectives.

In terms of organization of the Foundation itself, the major difference between the two bills is that the House version requires the board to select an executive committee which will be responsible for a number of details of policy formation and administrative supervision. The Senate version leaves the creation of an executive committee optional with the board itself. It is generally desirable to impose as little unnecessary restriction as possible on an agency whose problems and needs may change from time to time. So in this respect the Senate version is considered preferable by many people. Nevertheless, it is most unlikely that the Foundation would try to act without an executive committee. In practice, therefore, both bills would probably work out the same way, and so either should be acceptable to most scientists.

Three amendments to H. R. 4846 which have been recommended by the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce are of considerable importance. Section 3 (a) (6) of the House bill and Section 4 (a)

(6) of the Senate bill give as one of the functions of the Foundation:

. . . to correlate the Foundation's scientific research programs with those undertaken by individuals and by public and private research groups.

The proposed amendment to H. R. 4846 would change this section to read:

. . . to evaluate scientific research programs undertaken by individuals and by public and private research groups, including scientific research programs of agencies of the Federal Government, and to correlate the Foundation's scientific research programs with such programs.

Of related interest is the proposed amendment to delete from H. R. 4846 the following statement, which now appears in both House and Senate bills:

The activities of the Foundation shall be construed as supplementing and not as superseding, curtailing, or limiting any of the functions or activities of other Government agencies authorized to engage in scientific research or development.

Taken together, these two proposed amendments would give the Foundation called for by the House bill a somewhat greater coordinating power than that granted to the Foundation by the Senate bill.

The proposed Foundation would have three major functions. It would grant funds to subsidize approved research projects. It would offer fellowships and scholarships to students of the sciences. And it would serve as a top-level planning and coordinating agency for the nation's scientific program. There is no thought that it would put existing agencies, such as the Office of Naval Research or the research activities of the Department of Agriculture, out of business. Nevertheless, the House and Senate bills would give the Foundation a different status on its coordinating function. The Senate bill would require it to coordinate its own program with other existing ones and would instruct it not to step on any other agency's toes. The House bill would instruct it to keep an eye on other research programs, both government and private, and would remove the prohibition against stepping on another federal agency's toes if it finds something undesirable in that agency's program. The Senate version is therefore likely to be preferred by other federal agencies. Yet the House version would mean a stronger Foundation. The relative merits of these two views have not been given much consideration by scientists. The stronger version of the House bill seems to me to be preferable. The government's scientific activities are both great enough in scope and diverse enough in sponsorship to justify a Foundation with more authority than the purely negative one of seeing that its program is correlated with those undertaken by other individuals and groups.

The third proposed amendment would add a loyalty oath requirement for scholarship and fellowship holders. The amendment would add a part (b) to Section 10 reading as follows:

No part of any funds appropriated or otherwise made available for expenditure by the Foundation under authority of this Act shall be used to make payments under any scholarship or fellowship to any individual unless there is on file with the Foundation an affidavit executed by such individual that he does not believe in, and is not a member of and does not support any organization that believes in or teaches, the overthrow of the United States Government by force or violence or by any illegal or unconstitutional methods. The provisions of section 1001 of title 18, United States Code, shall be applicable in respect of such affidavits.

This amendment was proposed to the very great regret of scientists and to the equal regret of a number of members of Congress. It was proposed last spring when Atomic Energy Commission fellowship holders were under fire from other Congressional committees. It is a concession to the current temper of Congress and many citizens. But it is unnecessary; overt treason or acts of disloyalty are adequately handled by existing law, which is not strengthened by the affidavit requirement. It is also an invasion of freedom, and it is disturbing to have undergraduate and graduate students majoring in any of the sciences and supported by Foundation funds required to sign such an affidavit regardless of whether the work upon which they are engaged requires security classification or not. The affidavit is, however, a milder requirement than the FBI investigation which must now be made of all Atomic Energy Commission Fellows, and accepting it may be necessary. At its meeting in New York City on December 27 the Inter-Society Committee for a National Science Foundation formally voted its disapproval of the inclusion of this proposed amendment. At the same time, if the amendment is added despite the opposition which it will arouse, the bill as a whole

will have the support of the Inter-Society Committee.

If all goes well, the House should have an opportunity to vote on H. R. 4846 before the end of February. The chances are fairly good that the House will approve the bill. There will be some opposition on grounds of economy. The patent interests will oppose it. There may be a whispering campaign about un-American activities of some scientists. But if enough Representatives know that the scientists and educators of their own regions are solidly in favor of the bill, it will pass despite the opposition. A conference will then be necessary to resolve the differences between the House and Senate versions. Unless the House bill is changed much more drastically than now seems likely, it should not be difficult to resolve the differences, nor should there be any question about subsequent passage of the compromise measure by both houses of Congress and its approval by President Truman.

The immediate job is to get the bill out of the Rules Committee so that the House can vote on it. That is primarily a job for the legislative strategists. Then will come the question of votes by the House, first on proposed amendments, and then on the bill as a whole. Because the House has not considered National Science Foundation legislation as frequently or in as much detail as has the Senate, many Representatives are not well informed on the necessity for the Foundation or on the characteristics that would make it work most effectively. Neither are many of them aware of the importance attached to this legislation by scientists and educators in their own districts. Each individual scientist can help remedy that situation by talking or writing to the Representatives from his own district. Each Representative should know the attitudes of the scientists in his home district. Giving members of the House assurance that H. R. 4846 will make important contributions to the nation's welfare is therefore the responsibility of all scientists, all over the country.

