are not plentiful. It is possible that talented students manifested an increased interest in science and engineering as a result of World War II, and that this interest was at an abnormally high level during the late 1950's; thus, that what we have been observing during the period covered by this study is a cyclical correction rather than a major trend. However, the assumption on which this explanation rests—that there is some limit to the proportion of students who can be interested in a given area, and that when interest has reached this limit it will swing in the opposite direction—has little more appeal than the notion that recruitment programs decrease interest.

Another interesting paradox is apparent in the trends for engineering and college teaching. During the period covered by this study the shortage of talent in both these fields has been widely publicized, and there have been corresponding increases in salary levels. Yet, among talented students, the trend of interest in college teaching has been as bullish as the trend of interest in engineering has been bearish.

One must conclude from these observations that the factors determining the distribution of talent are not simple, and that many important influences remain unknown. Obviously the talent supply is not always responsive to direct attempts at manipulation.

Notes

1. This study is part of the research program of the National Merit Scholarship Corporation and was supported by grants from the National Science Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, and the Ford Foundation. Mary Alice Meyer contributed skillful assistance.
2. The dates referred to throughout are for the years the students were expected to graduate from high school. The students were actually tested approximately a year earlier.
3. These data were compiled by Mrs. Ruth Stalnaker and were presented each year in the annual report of the National Merit Scholarship Corporation. The coding categories were arbitrarily established to include the major groups of fields indicated by students in the early years and were not changed after that.
4. The sample and procedures are described more fully by A. W. Astin, *Science* **141**, 334 (1963).
5. This discussion of trends should not be interpreted to mean that Merit semifinalists are not interested in science in an absolute sense. R. C. Nichols and J. A. Davis [*Personnel Guidance J.* **42**, 794 (1964)] showed that Merit semifinalists more frequently plan careers in science and engineering than average college students do.

News and Comment

Elliott Inquiry: Chairman's Loss In Alabama Primary Raises Doubt About Future of Investigation

Representative Carl Elliott's defeat in last week's Alabama primary raises the question of what is going to happen to the House Select Committee on Government Research, whose creation was personally engineered by Elliott.

As things now stand, Elliott's loss has no direct bearing on the committee's activities. The nine-man committee, which was established by a unanimous vote of the House last fall, was given until the end of this year to conduct a comprehensive investigation of government support of research and associated activities. And Elliott's term will not expire until January. But from the committee's very beginning it was tacitly understood that the subject could not be properly covered in 14 months, and that, as the expiration date drew near, the House leadership would be extremely sympathetic to a request to extend the committee's life.

Whether such a request will now be forthcoming is a matter of some uncertainty. With Elliott gone from the committee, the chairmanship would go to the next-senior Democrat, Representative John Fogarty of Rhode Island. Fogarty has been noncommittal on whether he wants to assume the responsibility, but it is clear that his first legislative love is the NIH appropriations subcommittee, which he chairs. House rules permit him to head both committees, but Fogarty puts an incredible amount of time and energy into looking after NIH's interests in the House, and it would not be unreasonable for him to feel cool toward taking on another demanding job.

The next in the committee's five-man Democratic majority is George P. Miller of California, whose affection for the select committee has never been excessive. The House Aeronautical and Space Sciences Committee, which Miller chairs, reacted to the proposed establishment of the select committee by quickly setting up its own Subcommittee on Science, Research, and Development, chaired by Representative Emilio Q. Daddario (D–Conn.).

The two committees got geared up for hearings and studies at about the same time, and ever since, it has been something of a race to see which would become the principal forum for issues involving science and government. Neither has established a clear-cut lead, but since Miller, who is 73, is seeking to crown a long and useful political career by making the space committee a power in the House, it is unlikely that he would want to bestow his abilities upon a competing committee. After Miller come Representatives Mel Price, of Illinois, and Phil M. Landrum, of Georgia. Each might be quite interested in heading a committee whose potential for prestige and power is considerable, though as yet unrealized. But it remains to be seen whether they want the job. Price is well occupied with the chairmanship of subcommittees of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy and the Armed Services Committee, and Landrum, who was passed over for a seat on the powerful Ways and Means Committee last year, may get a chance at a vacancy there next year.

Another possibility, of course, is that the committee might be continued with an outsider as chairman. But that is unlikely, not only because it is rare for an outsider to be jumped to a chairmanship over sitting members of a committee but also because the committee, in large part, was tailored to Elliott's interests and political needs. And he, in turn, offered qualities that provided a middle ground between those who felt that government support of research had got out of hand and those who feared that an investigation could be used as a club against federal research activities.

Although verification of such matters

is usually impossible to obtain, it was generally felt that the House leadership endorsed Elliott's proposal for setting up the committee because it sympathized with his need for some sort of well-publicized activity that might help him in his political struggles in Alabama. Know-nothing antagonists of federal support for research, as well as the most dedicated supporters, agreed that the time was ripe for a careful survey of just what was going on in the government's $15-billion-a-year research and development programs, and Elliott, a responsible and careful legislator who would call the shots as he saw them, nicely filled the requirements for carrying out a disinterested study.

Little Publicity

Perhaps the most ironical thing about the select commitee is that, despite a bit of fumbling at the start, it is turning in a good performance. But it never turned out to be much of a publicity platform for Elliott. It was probably politically beneficial for him to be able to demonstrate that he could get the House to endorse unanimously his proposal for setting up a new committee, but after that was done, the committee's various hearings and publications never managed to throw a spotlight on the chairman.

For this, there is no explanation other than that Elliott—despite the fears of many members of the scientific community—approached his duties in a thoroughly responsible fashion. If his sole intention had been to raise the roof and draw attention to himself, it would not have been difficult to select a few nonsensical ventures that bore a research label and to have gone off on a campaign of righteous indignation. The public, probably in self-defense against the mysteries of science, seems to relish tales of supposed experts looking like thoroughgoing fools, and Elliott might thereby have become something of a folk hero. What he actually did, however, was to conduct a series of low-key hearings, make a few trips to research installations, carefully survey government research programs through questionnaires, and, in general, conduct himself as though he really wanted to find nothing more than what was going on in government support of research. A real question can be raised as to whether he and his staff tried to chew off too much, but, whatever the results, the intentions command respect.

Elliott's decision to take the high road in the investigation of research in many ways complements the decision that cost him the congressional seat that he has held for 16 years. He easily could have joined the extremists in Alabama, fallen into step with Governor Wallace's racist crowd, and safely returned to Washington for another 2 years. He chose, however, to seek something of a moderate course in Alabama's extremist politics. He opposed the civil rights bill when it was before the House, because not to have done so would have made political extermination a certainty rather than a probability. But he went along with the administration on most other matters; he earned the enmity of the conservative bloc in 1961 when he voted to liberalize the House Rules Committee, and he didn't make many friends in Alabama last fall when he described John Birch Society members as "loud mouthed knownothings whom Thomas Jefferson would have dismissed as intellectual nitwits and whom Jackson would have horsewhipped."

Election Loss

In the statewide primary last week he came in ninth, behind a Wallace-supported candidate, in a race for nominations for Alabama's eight congressional seats.

Meanwhile, the staff of the select committee is proceeding with the investigation, and it will soon issue a report, of about 150 pages, on "Administration of Research and Development Grants." (Copies may be obtained without charge from the House Select Committee on Government Research, 900 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, D.C.) During the past few months Elliott was deeply engaged in campaigning in Alabama and actually spent very little time with the committee. Oddly enough, one outcome of the election might be that he will devote a good deal of his remaining term to the investigation.

—D. S. GREENBERG

Technical Aid: Volunteer Group Enables Scientists, Engineers To Help Underdeveloped Nations

One of the differences between the rich and the poor nations is that the poor are often stymied by minor technical problems that were long ago solved by the rich. Several years ago it occurred to a group of scientists and engineers in the Schenectady, New York, area that they might be able to do something about this, and out of their decision has grown a remarkable organization, Volunteers for International Technical Assistance. Stated briefly, VITA is a sort of stay-at-home technical peace corps, composed of about 1000 scientists, engineers, and technical specialists who, without charge, serve as consultants on technical problems that have arisen in the underdeveloped countries.

For example, the Peace Corps, which has come to make good use of VITA, recently sent an inquiry from a volunteer in the Far East who was working on the early stages of a poultry project. What, he asked, would be the best feed mixture from available grain sources? The inquiry was forwarded to a department head at a major school of agriculture, who dispatched a sheet of simple instructions. In another case, an inquiry from a Caribbean island, asking about means of utilizing a good tomato crop, was forwarded to an executive of a food processing firm, who sent seven pages of handwritten step-by-step instruction on the preparation and bottling of tomato juice. Other inquiries have asked for advice on well-digging, construction of simple slide projectors, woodworking, pottery glazing, sewage disposal, water purification, and paper making.

One of the most refreshing things about VITA is its administrative simplicity. To become a member, an applicant simply fills out a form from VITA (1206 State Street, Schenectady, N.Y.), specifying the subject areas in which he feels qualified to serve as a consultant. When inquiries come in—they come from missionaries, government agencies, and a variety of other sources in addition to the Peace Corps—VITA headquarters forwards them to whomever seems to be the most suitable consultant. The consultant replies directly to the inquirer and sends a copy to the Schenectady office. And that's all.

In addition to counseling on specific problems, VITA, under a contract with the Agency for International Development, has prepared a *Village Technology Handbook*, a 169-page volume that contains a wealth of simple, how-to-do-it directions on turning odds and ends of pipes, steel drums, lumber, and, other cheap materials into useful de-