News and Comment

Elliott Committee: Final Reports Issued as 15-Month Investigation of Federal Research Comes to End

With the expiration of the 88th Congress, Representative Carl Elliott's Select Committee on Government Research went out of existence, openly confessing, in its final study, to a "tinge of frustration at not having had time to do more than raise some of the substantive questions of policy." The frustration can be widely shared, for Elliott's committee, despite many obstacles and pessimistic expectations, was developing into the sort of organization that has often been prescribed for the Congress: a well-staffed, influential entity that could serve as a center for legislative examination of the federal government's involvement in science, technology, and education.

The committee's demise, just as it was emerging from infancy, can in part be attributed to no more than a turn of political history—Elliott's defeat in last fall's Alabama primary; but interwoven with the personal element is the fact that Congress is yet to demonstrate any more than a low-keyed concern about its ability to handle the problems that Elliott took under surveillance.

The committee was established in September 1963 (*Science*, 23 Sept. 1963) as a gesture of support for Elliott, who was seeking an escape from the right-wing deluge that eventually overwhelmed him in Alabama. The House leadership, mindful of widespread unease over the annually rising costs of research and development, felt that it would be desirable to conduct a comprehensive survey—and simultaneously give Elliott a vehicle for obtaining publicity. Elliott thus got his committee, but not before the chairmen of the major standing committees with scientific and technical jurisdictions were given membership, a price they exacted to guard against the possibility that their own territory might be subjected to unsympathetic appraisal. Finally, the Elliott committee was constituted as a select committee, which meant that it had to be reestablished with each new Congress. When Elliott was defeated, none of his colleagues showed interest in succeeding him as chairman or in pushing to extend the life of the committee, and, as a result, the Select Committee on Government Research automatically went out of business at the end of the year. Elliott, who received little publicity from the committee's 15 months of work—basically because he insisted on a careful, nonsensational approach to the subject matter—is now back in Alabama, practicing law and possibly working for another try at public office.

The legacy of his committee is a set of hearings containing the testimony and statements of 75 witnesses, plus ten separate studies containing an accumulation of statistics—many of which were previously unavailable—and analyses and recommendations. In general, the recommendations called for what many observers of the nation's scientific, technical, and educational scene have been calling for: better coordination of federal support for research, improved techniques for collecting and disseminating information, broader distribution of federal funds for research and education, and the development of techniques for relating scientific and engineering training to long-term national needs.

But the committee also poked into some other matters, quite possibly to the annoyance of some of Elliott's colleagues, one of whom, George P. Miller, chairman of the House space committee, filed a letter stating that he felt "some reservations." These were, in most cases, related to conclusions that the space program, for which Miller's committee bears responsibility in the House, may not be as comprehensive a national blessing as space agency publicity men make it out to be.

The Elliott committee's report stated, for example, that "in the world of our probable future, our ability as a nation to compete will depend to a great extent on the efficacy of today's research into our grave social and economic problems. . . . In the sense of mission-oriented programs, we are spending greatly on defense, space, and nuclear missions and virtually nothing on the mission of securing our probable competitive future. . . . Apart from strictly economic problems, many of our social problems have become very costly. . . . In comparison to the dollars spent on the space program, we can well afford some additional pennies for research into these and many other areas."

The committee also took up another theme that supporters of space, military, and defense research programs find particularly grating—that their use of manpower is detrimental to other national needs: "It is critical," the committee stated, "that the Government avoid policies or procedures which lead to inefficient deployment or stockpiling of trained personnel. Manpower cost is as important as fiscal cost in consideration of major programs. But this has not been a significant criterion in major program choices to date. The huge technical programs of NASA, DOD, and AEC have absorbed large numbers of engineers and scientists. Yet no one at the time of decision has reckoned their worth on these programs as opposed to their alternative use in teaching, private industry, or other government programs."

It was in response to these and similar assertions that Representative Miller appended his letter of reservation to the final report, offering the explanation that he disagreed with certain points and, in addition, had not had time to study some of the later reports in detail. Miller wrote that he would provide a fuller explanation of his objections when the new session of Congress was under way.

Miller's reservations, and the failure of Elliott's colleagues to keep the committee alive, suggest an unpromising future for Elliott's most far-reaching and significant recommendation: that Congress establish a Joint Committee on Research Policy, which would be the legislative counterpart of the White House science advisory apparatus, in much the same fashion that the Congressional Joint Economic Committee is the counterpart of the President's Council of Economic Advisers. The Joint Economic Committee doesn't write laws or pass on appropriations, but with a first-rate professional staff and an industrious membership it has come to radiate a good deal of in-

Elliott Reports Available for Distribution

The following publications have been issued by the House Select Committee on Government Research. Copies may be ordered from the U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

Study No. 1: "The Administration of Research and Development Grants," is out of print.

Study No. 2: "Manpower for Research and Development," 25¢.

Study No. 3: "Federal Facilities for Research and Development," 60¢.

Study No. 4: "Documentation and Dissemination of Research and Development Results," 60¢.

Study No. 5: "Federal Student Assistance in Higher Education," 30¢.

Study No. 6: "Impact of Federal Research and Development Programs," 65¢.

Study No. 7: "Contract Policies and Procedures for Research and Development," 45¢.

Study No. 8: "Interagency Coordination in Research and Development," 25¢.

Study No. 9: "Statistical Review of Research and Development," 60¢.

Study No. 10: "National Goals and Policies," 25¢.

Hearings: "Federal Research and Development Programs": Part 1, $2.50; Part 2, $1.00; Part 3, 60¢. Committee print: "Federal Research and Development Programs," 15¢.

fluence simply by being very competent.

As Elliott's committee sees it, the Joint Committee on Research Policy would not supersede the committees that now have scientific and technical jurisdictions: rather, it would attempt to obtain the sort of overall view that now has little or no place in the thinking of committees responsible for specific programs or agencies. It would have no weapons to employ outside of reports and studies, but, hopefully, these could go a long way if they were well done.

It is far too early in the session to tell whether any influential support can be obtained for this proposal. But at this stage there is a great deal working against it. In response to the creation of Elliott's committee, subcommittees on research were set up by Miller's own space committee and by the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy and the Armed Services Committee. Thus, the way is far from clear for a new standing committee to step into the field of science and technology.

Furthermore, Congress seems to be tending toward less agitation about federal support for research and development. A few years ago it found that funds in this area were growing by a couple of billion dollars a year, and it became quite excited. But it now seems to be accustomed to R & D as a 15-percent slice of the budget, and rather than gaping at this figure, the members are concentrating on getting fair slices for their districts. Finally, the hearings held by Elliott and other committees have reinforced the sense of mystery that many laymen feel about science. One witness after another told these committees that you never know what might come out of the most nonsensical-sounding research project, and, in the absence of any solid argument to the contrary, the general congressional attitude seems to be that we don't understand it too well, or at all, but it's good for the country. If the new and large Democratic majority starts a wave of general congressional reform, it is possible that a Joint Committee on Research Policy might win approval, but in the absence of any large-scale revision of the committee structure, it seems unlikely that the Elliott committee will leave behind anything but an impressive pile of reports.—D. S. GREENBERG

Food: NAS–NRC Report Cites Microbiological Hazards in New Types of Processing

Serious outbreaks of food- and water-borne diseases are fortunately rare in this country. Despite the triumphs of public health and sanitation services, however, flare-ups of botulism caused by contaminated smoked fish and canned tuna and of infectious hepatitis traced to shellfish from polluted waters have served as reminders in recent years that constant vigilance is necessary. And Americans continue to suffer in substantial numbers from various forms of gastroenteritis, mainly food-borne.

Because these latter illnesses are usually relatively mild in their effects and of short duration, most of those affected suffer in statistical silence. But it is estimated that these diseases rank second only to respiratory infections among short-term illnesses suffered by members of middle-class families in the United States.

About 2 years ago an *ad hoc* subcommittee on food microbiology was formed by the National Academy of Sciences–National Research Council food protection committee, and the result was the recently published report *An Evaluation of Public Health Hazards from Microbiological Contamination of Foods.**

In the past, the NAS food protection committee has concentrated on problems related to chemicals in food production, processing, packaging, and storage. But the subcommittee was asked to take a hard look at the hazards associated with microbiological contamination of food.

In the words of the report, "Food scientists in industry and government are concerned about the increasing disparity between the rate of technological change in certain segments of the food industry and the level of efforts being made to evaluate and control health hazards associated with new products and processes. They recognize that radical departures from the time-honored practices in production, processing, preservation, distribution and serving of foods have raised new questions concerning the microbiological contamination of products now reaching large segments of the public

* Available from the Printing and Publishing Office of the National Academy of Sciences, 2101 Constitution Avenue, Washington, D.C. 20418; 64 pages; price, $2.