News and Comment

Humanities: Proposals To Set Up National Foundation Are Gathering Support in the House and Senate

A good deal of support has developed in the new Congress for proposals to provide the arts and humanities with some of the institutional and financial recognition the federal government long ago gave to the sciences.

Basically, the proposals call for establishing one, or possibly two, foundations, modeled in large part after the National Science Foundation, to provide money for humanistic studies and the performing and visual arts. At this point, the prospects look bright. The backers differ on a few points, principally whether the arts and humanities should be housed in one foundation, and how broadly the performing and visual arts should be defined. But the differences appear to arise from uncertainty, rather than any strongly held conviction that might turn allies to destructive feuding.

Contributing to the general optimism is the fact that no public word of opposition has been raised to the principle of the federal government's assuming some financial responsibility for the arts and the humanities. The most likely opponents, fiscal conservatives, have of course been well occupied in these first weeks of the 89th Congress with liberal-versus-conservative organizational battles. When the legislative deliberations on the foundation proposals reach the serious stage, some members of Congress can be expected to ask whether it is necessary or prudent for the federal government to establish a new agency to promote finger painting and Chaucer studies. But, for better or worse, things have evolved in this country to the point where very few legislators dare make fun of what is considered to be intellectual activity. Now and then a member will have some harsh things to say about the federal government's financing studies of, say, how turtles navigate, but the physical sciences seem to have won the fight to convince Congress that the quest for knowledge may lead anyplace, and there has been a beneficial, though far from complete, spillover to the social sciences and, to a lesser extent, the humanities. This is evidenced by last year's expansion of the National Defense Education Act to provide greater support for nonscientific disciplines. Whether this relaxation extends to the performing and visual arts remains to be seen. There may be a problem there. The basic sciences both suffer and benefit from the fact that they are generally incomprehensible to the public that supports them. Taxpayers and congressmen have yet to declare, "I don't know anything about chemical bonding, but I know what I like." However, that sort of judgment is easily and often applied by laymen to what they see on the stage and on canvas, and any federal agency that must operate in this area of strong tastes and changing values may encounter some difficult problems.

In the House, the proposal to provide government support for the arts and the humanities is contained in H.R. 334, introduced by William S. Moorhead, a Pittsburgh, Pa., Democrat. Moorhead's bill, which has been endorsed by some 70 members of both parties, is derived from a version that he introduced at the end of the last session, not with any expectation of passage, but simply to elicit interest and critical evaluation. The Moorhead bill calls for the establishment of a National Humanities Foundation to promote the study of "languages, literature, history, and philosophy; the history, criticism, and theory of the arts; the history of law, religion, and science; the creative and performing arts; and those aspects of the social sciences that have humanistic content and employ humanistic methods."

To accomplish this, the foundation would have authority to "develop and promote a broadly conceived policy of support for the humanities and the arts" and to provide "grants, loans, and other forms of assistance" for "educating and developing scholars, teachers, and artists at any stage of their growth." It would provide institutional grants and other support for "public and other non-profit institutions" that are "concerned with encouraging and developing scholars, teachers, and artists"; it could award "scholarships and graduate fellowships, including postdoctoral fellowships, and grants for research and for creative work and performance in the humanities and the arts." And, it could provide funds for "the improvement of library resources and services for research and for teaching at all levels in the humanities and the arts. . . ."

The first appropriation would be $5 million. The foundation would be headed by a full-time director, who would receive the same salary as the Librarian of Congress—$27,000. (Why this position was chosen to set the salary scale is not clear. The director of the National Science Foundation, which is the institutional parallel for the proposed Humanities Foundation, receives $28,500.) Like NSF, the NHF would have a 25-member board, but there are some possibly significant differences in the makeup of this body. The NSF board consists of 24 persons drawn from nongovernmental sources, plus the NSF director as an ex officio member. The NHF board, in the Moorhead bill, would consist of 20 members drawn from nongovernmental sources, plus five ex officio members from the federal government: the director, the U.S. Commissioner of Education, the Librarian of Congress, the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, and the Chairman of the National Council on the Arts (which was all that Congress accepted last year from a proposal to establish a National Arts Foundation). The inclusion of the ex officio members reflects an intention to have the foundation work closely with the various government institutions that are already supporting the arts and the humanities to some extent.

In the Senate there are now three bills proposing government support for the arts and the humanities. S. 111, introduced by Ernest Gruening (D–Alaska) and endorsed by 29 other senators, closely follows Moorhead's House version. However, two bills introduced by Claiborne Pell (D–R.I.) take a

somewhat different approach, although the differences would seem to be easily reconcilable. Pell, who last year sought to establish a National Arts Foundation, has again introduced a bill to accomplish that goal, S. 315. But he has also introduced a bill, S. 316, to establish a National Humanities Foundation that would wholly encompass the functions prescribed for the Arts Foundation. The humanities parts of the combined bill are essentially the same as corresponding provisions in the Moorhead and Gruening versions, but the Pell bill spells out the arts activities in greater detail, specifying, for example, that the arts are to be defined as including "music (instrumental and vocal), drama, dance, folk art, creative writing, architecture and allied fields, painting, sculpture, photography, graphic and craft arts, industrial design, costume and fashion design, motion pictures, television, radio, tape and sound recordings . . . plays (with or without music), ballet, dance and choral performances, concerts, recitals, operas, exhibitions, readings. . . ."

Under the Pell bill, the foundation would provide no more than 50 percent of the cost of any production, and groups would be ineligible for assistance if any of their net earnings went to private parties. Pell would start the foundation off with $10 million and raise the appropriation to $20 million in the second fiscal year.

As far as the internal workings of Congress are concerned, the proposals have good fortune on their side. In the House, the Moorhead proposal will go before an Education and Labor select subcommittee headed by Frank Thompson (D–N.J.), who is known to be sympathetic. In the Senate, it will be handled by the Labor and Public Welfare Committee's special subcommittee on the arts. Pell was chairman of this subcommittee in the last congress and will probably continue in that post, although there is a slight possibility that this may be affected by his appointment last week to the Appropriations Committee.

In any case, the prospects are bright, but the proposal is not yet in the category of a sure thing. It has a clear endorsement from President Johnson, who said at Brown University last September, "I look with the greatest favor upon the proposal . . . for a National Foundation for the Humanities." But out of caution, rather than hostility, the Congress may decide to take a long and careful look at what is in many respects a revolutionary proposal. Support for the sciences evolved initially from science's utility in exploration and later in military, agricultural, and medical matters. The needs were clear, and so were the dividends. The needs are also clear in the areas that come under the headings of arts and the humanities, but the early and easy outpouring of congressional support should not obscure the fact that some members, fully sympathetic to the arts and the humanities, harbor real concerns about the wisdom of meeting these needs through setting up a new federal agency. One of these members, with close ties to a major university in his district, commented that he endorsed Moorhead's bill but, before the matter comes to a vote, is going to have to be persuaded that the proposed NHF is the right way to meet what he readily agrees is an important need. Furthermore, while the scientists have had long experience in dealing with Congress and have formed useful alliances there, some of the humanists who have been lobbying through the corridors strike the members and their staffs as annoyingly amateurish. One staff member, who is heavily relied upon by one of the House's leading supporters of federal aid to education, remarked, after a long talk with one of the backers of the NHF, "I didn't have any idea of what he was talking about and I don't think he did either." The comment may be unfair, but it was made.

—D. S. GREENBERG

Weather Modification: NAS Panel Report and New Program Approved by Congress Reveal Split on Policy

After World War II it was widely assumed that a great time of beating scientific swords into technological plowshares was beginning. Perhaps the most dramatic prospects of all were proclaimed for the peaceful atom and weather modification. But while men have taken giant steps toward mastering their environment, the two prodigies have hardly fulfilled the great expectations.

Now nuclear plants producing electric power have begun to operate in the black, the uses of nuclear materials in industry and medicine are increasingly impressive, and the civilian atom seems to be coming of age. Weather modification, however, remains in the research and development stage.

High hopes, nevertheless, continue to be held for doing something about the weather. Last year Congress, by special resolution, appropriated $1 million intended for use in the most ambitious "operational" weather modification program so far. But, at the same time, a National Academy of Sciences panel was completing a survey of research activities in the field and an estimate of the potential and the limitations of future research, and late last fall it issued a report* which put a damper on expectations of major triumphs in modifying the weather very soon.

The resolution and the report present a contrast which reflects a controversy over the pace and direction of the national weather modification program. This controversy could become increasingly significant, since it ranges a group of influential legislators on one side, some distinguished atmospheric scientists on the other, and several science-oriented federal agencies in the middle.

The differences grow directly out of the modern history of weather modification, which began in the later 1940's with the well-known work of Langmuir and Schaefer on cloud modification. The Department of Defense financed sizeable projects in 1947, and since then the federal government has been involved as a patron of research in this field.

From the outset, public interest in weather modification centered on rainmaking. By the early 1950's some of the early enthusiasm had waned, because claims of success and refutations were about equally vociferous. But the armed services and the departments of Agriculture, Interior, and Health, Education, and Welfare continued to sponsor or conduct research in atmospheric sciences related to weather modification. Conspicuously absent from the field was the Weather Bureau in the Department of Commerce, which under its former chief, Francis W. Reichelderfer, displayed a studied lack of interest in weather modification research.

In 1958 the National Science Foundation was designated by Congress to promote and coordinate projects in the necessary fields to insure an effective national weather modification program. Other agencies continued to support applied and basic research; NSF primarily

* *Scientific Problems of Weather Modification*, available from the Printing and Publishing Office, National Academy of Sciences, 2101 Constitution Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20418