Training Grants (II): Remedy Sought by Persuasion and by Legislation

The Nixon Administration's decision to do away with the training programs of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) came to light early last January, in rumors that spread across the country even before the President's budget for fiscal 1974 was officially released (*Science*, 26 January). It sent the biomedical community into a state of shock from which it has not yet recovered.

Training money—more than $100 million worth—was the cornerstone of the biomedical research business, supporting both young investigators, through stipends, and the senior researchers who taught them, through faculty salaries. Now, if some alternative form of federal support is not forthcoming, universities, medical schools, and research institutions are going to have to find some other source of funding, and they are not at all sure that they can do it. Understandably, their desire to see the government reconsider its position is overwhelming. Whether they can get it to do so is another matter.

The Administration's plan to phase out training programs, between now and 1977, provoked a predictable flurry of protests from biologists in both basic and clinical research. Reporters were urged to bring the problem to the public's attention. Professional societies sent telegrams to the President and to Congress. The Federation of American Scientists circulated among its members a petition signed by eight Nobel laureates, asking members to add their names before it is sent on to the President. Leaders in biology decried the situation from every available platform, and one predicted that "lights will go out in laboratories all over America." In an article on the Op Ed page of the *New York Times*, outspoken Nobelist James D. Watson called the Administration's action "lunacy."

The Administration said nothing. As was discussed in an article last week (*Science*, 20 April), the President's Office of Management and Budget (OMB) asked NIH to justify its opinion that training programs should be maintained and was unimpressed with the justification. But the biomedical community, equally unconvinced by the Administration's explanation of its opinion, is not giving up.

There appear to be two possible paths to salvation. One is by persuasion, the other by legislation. Some indication that the former path should not be discounted turned up recently at a meeting of the National Cancer Advisory Board. There, investment banker Benno C. Schmidt, who is chairman of the President's Cancer Advisory Panel, which oversees the board, said he had taken the matter to the White House, where he succeeded in getting the subject reopened for discussion.

Schmidt reported that he had told White House officials that neither he nor members of the board agreed with the decision to cut training programs, "as far as it applies to the cancer program." He said he told them that "cutting training programs is like trying to have a national football team without any rookies."

Schmidt, who is in a unique position in that he has earned the respect of the scientists on the board as well as of the administrators in the White House, also offered the board members a bit of free advice on how to be heard by those administrators: speak rationally and without rhetoric. Aiming a remark at Watson, whom he called a friend, Schmidt said, "I think Jim's excessive rhetoric on the subject in the *New York Times* does nothing to help me get decisions reversed." Schmidt is hoping that some form of training support can be negotiated before "opinions become too entrenched on both sides," and would just as soon that scientists did not go around referring to the Administration's policy as lunacy.

Schmidt's report to the board elicited a variety of reactions. Watson just smiled. But Harold Amos of Harvard spoke up, saying he trusted that Schmidt was not implying that board members whose language differed from his were somehow doing the cause a disservice. Schmidt assured him that was not his intention.

Then Amos brought up another, critical, point that was on several other persons' minds as well. "I'm not sure," he said, "that there is agreement that we should seek special training relief for the cancer program to the exclusion of other areas of science." Sol Spiegelman of Columbia University predicted that if cancer scientists fight for money for themselves alone, they may alienate the rest of the scientific community. "We do not want to make enemies of our colleagues," he declared. But others, including R. Lee Clark, head of the M. D. Anderson Hospital and Tumor Institute in Houston, Texas, and a member of the panel, took a "charity begins at home" approach and argued that their first duty is to the cancer program.

The question was never fully resolved in many people's minds, but the board did take an official stand on training programs in passing a resolution that asked the panel to "seek a personal audience with the President to bring our grave concern to his attention." The formal wording of the resolution is limited to training funds for the cancer program.

The board's carefully worded resolution was written by a committee headed by John R. Hogness, president of the Institute of Medicine, and reflected Schmidt's advice that it ask the panel to pursue the matter rather than suggest that members of the board try to see the President themselves. The latter approach had been proposed by Watson, who said perhaps the board should ask to speak to the President "because it is not clear that there is anyone else to talk to except an unknown man named Cavanaugh."

Cavanaugh, a Kissinger for Health?

Cavanaugh is James Cavanaugh, a White House aide who worked in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) before he was dispatched to the executive office early in Nixon's first term. Cavanaugh has a Ph.D. in hospital administration. During the last few months, according to officials who deal with him, he has become increasingly powerful, as the man in the White House who handles HEW, and is being called the Henry Kissinger for health. Although Schmidt is unwilling to say whom he sees when he goes to the White House, noting that naming

names would embarrass his contacts and decrease his own effectiveness, it is almost certain that he is in fairly frequent touch with Cavanaugh, who has taken a special interest in the cancer program.

There seems to be a consensus among science policy buffs in Washington that, if anyone can negotiate with Cavanaugh and other White House people, Schmidt can. Schmidt is a straightforward and sensible man. As a managing partner of J. H. Whitney and Company, a venture capital firm in New York, he clearly has the business acumen the Administration respects. And, of course, unlike the scientists who have been protesting training cuts, Schmidt is a nonpartisan observer. If the White House is to change or modify its position, it seems certain that it will be Schmidt and people like him whose judgments will be persuasive.

While an effort at diplomacy is going on in one area of Washington, an attempt to win congressional action is being made in another. The scientists who have been unable to penetrate the White House have gotten through to Representative Paul G. Rogers, (D–Fla.), who has introduced a bill that would, in effect, reinstate the NIH training programs with only a few changes. Rogers' bill reportedly was written to a significant extent by officers of the American Association of Medical Colleges, an outfit whose members will be badly hurt by the loss of training money.

One of the Administration's primary objections to the training programs has stemmed from its belief that the money often goes to young men and women who, after getting 2 or 3 years of free education, go into private medical practice and get rich. These people, the Administration maintains, should take out loans, not rely on federal largesse. Although Rogers and his staff aides are not convinced that this is a serious problem, they were willing to try to handle it. The bill, therefore, provides that persons receiving training assistance be required to engage in research or teaching for 24 months for each academic year of training the government pays for. Anyone choosing not to meet that obligation, going into private practice instead, would have to repay the government.

The Rogers bill provides for a total of $643 million in training program funds for 3 years and includes an anti-impoundment clause to guarantee that the money will be spent. Whether Rogers' bill will pass the House is uncertain. Nor is it entirely clear how far Rogers will go in pushing for it, although there is no doubt that he is committed to health and research causes. It is possible, of course, that the anti-impoundment clause could stand in the way of the bill's passage, depending to some extent on what the Congress decides to do about this touchy issue in general. And it is possible that, even if the existing bill or some compromise version of it makes its way through the House and Senate, where Edward Kennedy (D–Mass.) is seen as the man to look to in health matters, Nixon would simply veto it. The outcome is therefore, to say the least, uncertain.

Meanwhile, back at the drawing board, biomedical leaders are talking about coming up with alternate proposals for systems of federal financing of training in biomedical sciences, but apparently none has actually been put together. However, as one investigator put it recently, "Something is bound to happen. We're just not going to abolish training, because the post-doc trainees are the ones who not only have bright ideas, as everyone points out, they're also the ones who do the work. They're essential. When it comes right down to it, we'll find a way to support them because we cannot do without them."

—BARBARA J. CULLITON

Space Shuttle: Despite Doubters, Project Will Probably Fly

The debate about the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's proposed space shuttle churned on in the Senate this month at hearings on authorizations and appropriations for the agency in fiscal 1974. The basic issue seems to be the wisdom of embarking on a costly new long-range project in a decade when NASA can expect only level funding at slightly more than $3 billion a year. The Administration has requested an appropriation of $475 million for development of shuttle plans in 1974, the beginning of a sharp rise in allocations which are expected to climb to $1 billion per annum in a couple of years.

Proponents of the shuttle say it is essential for retaining the United States' lead in space activities and that ultimately it will result in big savings. Opponents say the shuttle is not economical, that its introduction is premature, and that it will severely cut into other less glamorous but essential NASA scientific activities.

The Senate Committee on Aeronautical and Space Sciences tried to cast some new light on shuttle matters by staging something akin to a debate among a panel of six distinguished personages, equally divided on the advisability of plunging ahead with the shuttle. Pro-shuttle were Klaus P. Heiss, the economist who headed the 2-year study by Mathematica, Inc., of Princeton, N.J., that is being used to justify the project; Allen F. Donovan of the Aerospace Corporation; and Harrison (Jack) Schmitt, the geologist who went on the Apollo 17 mission. Antishuttle (at least for now) were Thomas Gold of the Cornell Center for Radiophysics and Space Research; George W. Rathjens, political science professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; and James Van Allen of the University of Iowa.

It was a good debate for people who tire of having domestic problems and poor people injected into every discussion of national priorities. The only mention of such matters was made by Rathjens, who suggested that some of the NASA budget could better be used for lowering taxes or improving educa-