Scientists Go to Washington

This seems to be the year of the congressional science fellowship. In addition to programs recently announced by the AAAS and the American Physical Society (APS), three other professional organizations have inaugurated or are seriously considering such programs.

All three have set up offices in Washington, D.C., within the last year. The American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME), the first to get into the act, has posted an engineer, Barry Hyman, with the Senate Commerce Committee for a year. Arrangements for this were stimulated by talks with Representative John Davis (D–Ga.), chairman of the House science subcommittee. Hyman's salary is being paid half by ASME and half by George Washington University, from which he is taking leave.

The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) has hired a man (identity as yet undisclosed) who will start a year as a congressional staffer in September.

Finally, the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics is seriously exploring the possibility of supporting a congressional fellow and is casting around for potential sources of monetary support.

Idea Tossed Around for Years

The idea of installing scientific and technical experts as congressional aides has been bubbling along for several years now. Members of Congress have responded enthusiastically to it as one way of obtaining solid technical input for new legislation, and a 1970 poll indicated that a vast majority of congressmen felt that they were at a significant disadvantage, compared to the Executive Branch, when it came to having ready sources of technical expertise.

The decline of scientists' influence in the top levels of governmental decision-making has undoubtedly given timeliness to the fellowship idea, although as Joel Primack, junior fellow at Harvard and instigator of the APS program points out, the new fellows are supposed to be staff members, not science advisers.

An IEEE official pointed out that fellowships are part of the general expansion of awareness that the job of a scientist is not limited to spending day after day at the bench. The employment crisis for scientists and engineers has done much to persuade technical people that political involvement is appropriate and, indeed, necessary.

Primack believes that scientific societies are finally beginning to develop an expanded sense of responsibility. He cited a letter from W. W. Havens, APS executive secretary, who had had serious doubts about the advisability of a congressional fellows program. He said he was finally won over by the fact that this went a long way toward "legitimizing for physicists activities other than traditional research in universities or industry." In other words, a concept that the "radicals" have fought for for several years has finally become "establishment."

Few Technical Experts in Congress

At present there is one scientist in Congress—Mike McCormack (D–Wash.), a chemist—and a tiny handful of scientist–staff members. McCormack has indicated that Congress could well use the services of up to 100 scientifically trained staff members. While limitations of space and money would prohibit this large an influx of talent, it seems likely that, as legislation related to science and technology becomes increasingly sophisticated and complex, the need for such people will be taken for granted.

Three AAAS fellows will be starting work on Capitol Hill in September. The $50,000 for their stipends is being contributed half by the AAAS and half by a private individual. The APS, which will ante up $30,000 for the support of two fellows, is still forming its selection committee.—C.H.

cording to a cooperative regional research study, "the rural population is dichotomous in racial composition." Hightower draws an unfavorable comparison between the paucity of research devoted to the welfare of rural peoples and the existence of such projects as a Cornell study on cleaning teeth in dogs and a disease-tracking plan devised at Iowa State University that involved tagging every newborn pig with the owner's social security number. Land-grant college research for rural people and places, he says, is a sham.

A not dissimilar verdict is returned by the two Pound committee panels that covered much of the same ground. One panel, directed by Dale E. Hathaway, chairman of the department of agricultural economics at Michigan State University, surveyed the general state of social science research. A second panel, under Daryl J. Hobbs, chairman of the department of sociology and rural sociology at the University of Missouri, made a special study of rural sociological research.

According to Hathaway's panel, a succession of committees, commissions, and advisory groups has recommended a redirection of the USDA's research priorities toward the problems of people and communities, but without effect. Social science research in both the USDA and the state agricultural experiment stations (SAES) is 90 percent economics and only 10 percent sociology. Within the USDA, most social science is conducted by the Economic Research Service (ERS), an agency with a $15 million budget. There are a handful of social scientists in other USDA agencies, including the Cooperative State Research Service (CSRS), which hands out federal monies to the state agricultural experiment stations. The USDA devoted a total of 539 scientific man-years to the social sciences in 1969, of which 18 were in sociology, and the states devoted 477, of which 75 were in sociology.

The ERS staff, the USDA's principal group of social scientists, spend their time in compiling basic economic statistics, in performing policy analysis for the Secretary of Agriculture, and in doing social science research. As far as the first function is concerned, the Hathaway panel notes that the economic statistics relating to food and fibers are of unique quality, but that comparable data have not been developed for matters relating to the welfare of rural people. As for policy analysis,