

## NSF Authorization Coming Up

The National Science Foundation's new "Science for Citizens" program continues to be the major source of differences between the House and Senate as the NSF authorization bill for fiscal 1978 moves into conference. The final version of the bill may be expected to be licked into shape this month.

The program, allotted \$1 million for the 1977 fiscal year, is designed to raise the level of technical expertise among the citizenry by making money available for public interest groups to hold educational forums and workshops, and to individual scientists to do work on public policy issues in affiliation with such groups.

This year's Senate authorization—\$1.9 billion for the next 2 years—contains provisions for major expansion of the program along the lines originally envisaged by Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.), chairman of the health and science subcommittee of the Human Resources Committee. Although the Administration's fiscal 1977 budget only contained a \$1.2 million request for the program, the Senate bill would increase the sum to \$5 million in 1978 and \$5.75 million in 1979. In addition to providing for forums and internships, this would enable some nonprofit groups to actually "put together their own team" (according to a Kennedy staffer) to grapple with technical matters, and to develop other means to bridge the gap between scientists and the public, such as radio and television programs; registries of scientists and engineers to serve as resources for local decision-makers; a national information clearinghouse; and a regional center to support science-related public policy issues.

### The Second Time Around

These schemes fell by the wayside in House-Senate conference last year, and are likely to encounter more resistance from House members who have been reluctant to endorse even the modified program. This year's House bill only allots \$100,000 for science for citizens—out of a total authorization of \$868 million—because they want the program assessed before it gets any more money.

The chief House critic of the program, this year as last, is Representative Mike McCormack (D-Wash.), who is particularly concerned that federal money will go to help citizens fight nuclear power plants. Other members of the Committee on Science and Technology are also bothered by the prospect of the government, through NSF, giving money to biased advocacy groups who would use it to press court suits. In fact, McCormack was quoted last year (*Science*, 15 October 1976) as saying intervenors were "drooling over this."

However, a report of a study ordered by Congress and completed last February by the law firm of Boasberg, Hawes, Finkelstein & Klores on "implications of NSF assistance to nonprofit citizens organizations" suggests the fears may be unfounded. The report notes that the program, unlike other legislative proposals that would underwrite lawyers' fees and court costs for groups engaged in litigation, is "more substantively directed . . . to support for scientific and technical enquiry." The potential for legal intervention, "while controversial," says the report, should not be allowed to detract from "the much broader question of participation of nonprofit groups in scientific and technological public policy decision-making."

The report acknowledges the concern in some quarters that "the emotional gales of public participation might endanger the Foundation's basic research and education missions." But "we could find no hard evidence that previous NSF forays into sensitive fields had led to a serious diminution either of overall esteem or appropriations for the Foundation."

Although no grants have yet been made under the science for citizens program, NSF officials sound optimistic that it can fulfill its purpose, which is to get scientific expertise in on the ground floor in public policy debates. Alexander Morin, director of the Office of Science and Society, says several hundred proposals have been received, none of them from hotheads, and all generally "interesting and useful, straightforward, reasonable, and educational." Review panels will be meeting this summer and the first awards will be made in September—25 for public service science residencies (for scientists and engineers with Ph.D.'s), 25 internships (for students), and an undetermined number for organizations who want to hold conferences and workshops.

In addition to the science for citizens program, a number of other substantial differences between House and Senate await resolution, most of them reflecting the House's more conservative stance when it comes to NSF support of public involvement and education, and services for minorities. The Senate authorization for fiscal 1978, \$892 million, exceeds the House's by \$24 million.

Some differences are:

- Period covered by the authorization: The NSF is accustomed to 1-year authorizations; this year, for the first time, the Senate wants to experiment with a 2-year bill.

- CAUSE: or Comprehensive Assistance for Undergraduate Science Education is a 2-year-old program that makes money available to undergraduate institutions to upgrade their science teaching. The House wants \$17.5 million; the Senate has asked for \$100,000 to assess the program. A House staffer says it is speculated that the Senate withheld money for this program so Senate support could be used as a bargaining chip to pry concessions from the House on the science for citizens program.

- Industrial research: NSF's current policy is to favor academic over industry-based research, and basic research proposals from industry are funded only if they are of exceptional quality or have some unique feature. The Senate has determined this policy "may be too restrictive" and directs that industry proposals be reviewed on an equal footing with those from academe. (The National Science Board reviewed the present policy 9 months ago and decided to stick with it; however, it is now being rereviewed.)

- Minority graduate centers: This is a pilot program in which NSF will give grants to universities in inner cities and other areas where there is substantial minority enrollment, for the purpose of upgrading graduate science programs. The House bill provides \$1 million for the program, which is what the Administration requested. The Senate wants to move faster and under Kennedy's prodding voted to give it \$6 million.

The House and Senate are substantially in harmony, at least, as far as basic research is concerned. For this, the House authorizes a total of \$590.6 million; the Senate, \$608.4 million.—C.H.