

A representative of the American Civil Liberties Union said his organization would take the state to court if the bill passes into law.

As anticipated, Judge William Overton's opinion on the unconstitutionality of the Arkansas creationist law was cited frequently by the bill's opponents, although one proponent suggested the judgment was worthless because the case had been inadequately defended. Even if the committee ignores Overton's precedent-setting decision, members will want to consider the opinion of Maryland's own attorney general, Stephen Sachs. "House bill 1078 has as its purpose and effect the advancement of religion," stated Sachs on the day prior to the hearing.

If, as expected, Scannello's bill dies in committee, the legislature can look forward to another creationist initiative next session. This one, to be presented by the Family Protection Lobby, would give local school boards the option to adopt creationist curricula if they so chose.—**Roger Lewin**

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## Looking a Gift Computer in the Mouth at NSF

The National Science Foundation (NSF) will soon start soliciting donations of computer equipment for use in a foundation science education program. The National Science Board (NSB), the NSF's governing body, has also authorized exploration of broader use of donated equipment in NSF programs. The move could help overcome the shortcomings of equipment in many university laboratories, but has raised some tricky policy questions.

In January, the board considered an offer from two computer manufacturers to donate microcomputers for distribution under an NSF program that fosters use of computers in science education. NSB members were uneasy about some features of the proposal and asked the NSF staff to make revisions and resubmit it. The board approved the revised version at its February meeting and also told the NSF staff to study the possibility of wider use of donated equipment.

A major concern of the board was that NSF acceptance of donated

equipment might appear to be an endorsement of the manufacturer's products by the foundation. The board also wanted assurance that the staff had recommended the program on its merits and that the prospective gifts were not skewing priorities in NSF science and engineering education programs.

NSF Deputy Director Donald N. Langenberg says that the board was determined to "avoid the appearance of giving an NSF Good Housekeeping seal of approval" and prevent "inappropriate advertising," and recognized, "there was the question of fairness, of equity of involvement" for manufacturers.

The revised version of the proposal specifies that the program is open to all manufacturers. To avoid the impression of an NSF imprimatur, agreements drawn up between NSF and donors will provide that NSF's name not be used in advertising or public statements without NSF approval.

NSB board members are now apparently also satisfied that NSF staff had their priorities straight in recommending the new initiative for the program in question—Development in Science Education (DISE). The board was assured that a long-standing objective of DISE has been to promote the use of computers in education.

Under the revised plan, applicants for the grants will have the option of using their own equipment, soliciting donations of equipment themselves, or requesting items from a list of donated equipment that NSF will make available. Langenberg and other NSF officials emphasize that donated equipment will be gifts to grantees, not to NSF.

To build a list of available equipment, NSF will solicit discreetly through notices in the *Federal Register* and *Commerce Business Daily*. Donors will be asked to provide equipment worth a minimum of \$50,000 and be expected to give grantees information on hardware donated and access to company technical expertise and system software.

Industry interest in the idea of donating equipment should be whetted by recently enacted tax legislation that provides tax benefits to companies for such gifts. NSF officials say, however, that so far they have had only general indications of such interest.

The new initiative marks the first major instance of NSF serving as a direct agent for donated equipment, if at arm's length. NSB's receptiveness to the idea has no doubt been heightened by its growing concern over the inadequacy of computers and scientific instrumentation in university research. The original offer of equipment came at a time when instrumentation funding had received rough handling in the 1982 and 1983 budgets. The board sees the new initiative as one way to help and is willing at least to entertain the possibility of extending the formula to other foundation programs.—**John Walsh**

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## Hearings Planned for Classification Order

The Reagan Administration appears to have heeded critics who complained that the Executive was planning to increase its power to impose security classification on government information without adequate discussion. The comment period for the draft Executive Order on Security Classification, which was scheduled to end on 22 February, has been extended, according to Glenn English (D-Okla.), chairman of the House subcommittee on government information and individual rights. Since the new classification order would greatly increase the government's power to classify, English felt it was important that it be fully discussed.

English received a telephone call from national security adviser William Clark notifying him of the extension. English and seven other House committee and subcommittee chairmen wrote to Clark on 10 February complaining that the original deadline left too little time for hearings on the order (*Science*, 26 February, p. 1080).

In a statement on the House floor, English expressed his pleasure that the deadline was extended, commenting that, "There has been little public circulation of the draft order and, consequently, little public debate." The government information and individual rights subcommittee plans to hold hearings on the classification order on 10 and 11 March. No new deadline has been set for comments on the order.—**Gina Kolata**