

GENERAL SCIENCE

# Research Support Blocked

Government support of scientific research was postponed for an indeterminable length of time by the veto of the National Science Foundation bill.

By WATSON DAVIS

➤ BY WITHHOLDING approval of the national science foundation bill and preventing it from becoming law, President Truman has postponed full-scale government support of basic scientific research for at least six months, probably for two years and perhaps longer.

The bill, given pocket veto after passage by both houses, was the result of two years of hearings, debate and compromises in congress. For a year earlier at the request of President Roosevelt, a committee headed by Dr. Vannevar Bush, director of the wartime Office of Scientific Research and Development, worked on a plan for peacetime government support of science and brought forth recommendations that did not differ markedly from the provisions of the bill finally passed.

The Bush plan of power vested in part-time scientific board won out over the single, responsible administrator type of organization vigorously favored by President Truman, the then Secretary of Commerce Wallace and the budget bureau. Both the House and Senate voted down the in-line customary type of organization, preferring to make a group of scientists responsible.

## Single Administrator Preferred

Polls among representative scientists showed that they favored heavily at the opening of the 80th congress the single administrator with advisory committees. But when Congress decided upon a foundation membership of 24 serving part-time, 99 out of a hundred scientists went along with this provision, confident that this administrative plan would work fairly and effectively. They pointed to the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics as a good example of a part-time committee that has administered research successfully for the government since World War I.

Scientists in all fields are disappointed that the national foundation bill did not become law. Some of them point out that control of research funds available for grants are left, by default, largely in the hands of the Army, Navy and Air

Force. They admit that military funds have kept in operation research projects of importance generally, not alone to defense. But they want to see research predominantly in civilian hands and the military research bureaus have agreed with them.

Scholarships for young research scientists were authorized in the bill as an aid to filling the depleted ranks of scientific investigators. This is considered one of the most important functions of the foundation, now delayed.

Both political parties are in favor of science, you may be sure, and the few members of congress who opposed the unsigned bill were careful to go on record for science research. While the unsigned bill, S.526, was a Republican majority measure, it had strong Democratic support and was based solidly on previous bills of the 79th congress.

Whether Congress will reconsider the matter of a national science foundation in its pre-election session in January and

enact a bill more to his liking, as President Truman hopes, is problematical. Real hopes for a national science foundation may be unjustified. Scientists confronted by some of the world's greatest and most urgent problems will have to do the job with what they now have. The government reinforcements aren't coming.

## Truman's Objections

*Excerpts from President Truman's Memorandum of Disapproval:*

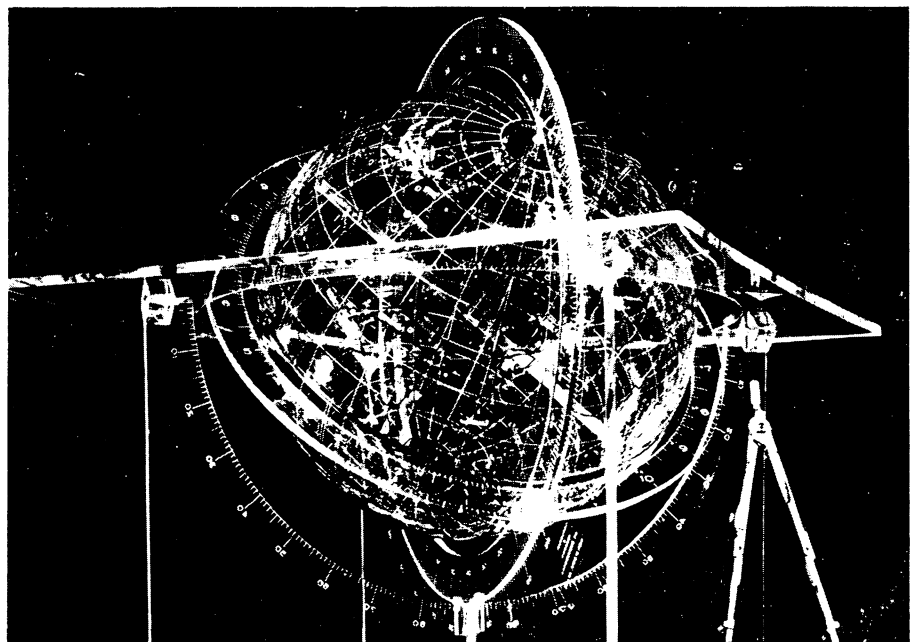
"I am withholding my approval of S. 526, the National Science Foundation Bill.

"I take this action with deep regret.

"The proposed National Science Foundation would be divorced from control by the people to an extent that implies a distinct lack of faith in democratic processes.

"The Government's expenditures for scientific research and development activities currently amount to hundreds of millions of dollars a year. Under present world conditions, this work is vital to our national welfare and security. We cannot afford to jeopardize it by imposing upon it an organization so likely to prove unworkable.

"Apart from the conflicts and confusion which would result from this complex organization, the bill would



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violate basic principles which make for responsible government.

"There are other compelling reasons why control over the administration of this law should not be vested in the part time members of the Foundation.

"Adherence to the principle that responsibility for the administration of the law should be vested in full time officers who can be held accountable will not prevent the Government from utilizing with great advantage the services of eminent scientists who are available only for part time duty.

"It is unfortunate that this legislation cannot be approved in its present form. The withholding of my signature at this time, however, will not prevent the the Government from engaging in the support of scientific research.

"We must start with a law which is basically sound.

"I hope that the Congress will reconsider this question and enact such a law early in its next session."

#### From National Research Council:

*Excerpts from Statement by Dr. Detlev W. Bronk, Chairman, National Research Council.*

"The President has rightly said that national security and welfare require that direct federal support be given to basic scientific research and to increasing the number of trained scientists. Accordingly, it is regrettable that differences of opinion between the legislative and executive branches of the government regarding administrative policies have barred the creation of a National Science Foundation, which would have fostered scientific research throughout the country to the general advantage of the American people.

"The need for such a foundation is great at the present time when universities are hard-pressed for funds with which to carry on essential research and when the ranks of adequately trained scientists are seriously depleted.

"Scientists generally will therefore hope that these needs may be met by the passage of legislation in the next Congress which will satisfy both Congress and those concerned with executive function and which will preserve the traditional freedom of the scientific investigator."

#### Senator Smith's Opinion:

"It is a great regret to me that the President has made a 'political football' out of what undoubtedly would have

been the greatest contribution made in this country by any Congress since the turn of the century. I believe the cause of science has been set back 10 years by his action," states Sen. H. Alexander Smith, Rep., N. J.

#### National Academy Head:

Comment on veto by Dr. Alfred N. Richards, president of the National Academy of Sciences:

"Too bad."

#### Dr. Karl T. Compton States:

"The veto of the National Science Foundation Bill is disappointing at a time when help and encouragement are needed. Practically everyone agrees that the universities and colleges cannot contribute their part in meeting the post-war scientific needs of the country on their prewar basis of financial support, and everyone knows that national security and prosperity require assiduous attention to science and the training of scientists.

"I believe the President was poorly advised on this action. I believe that the values of getting the program going promptly outweigh the objections to the form of the bill, which could be corrected later if in practice they proved serious." Dr. Compton is president of Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

*Science News Letter, August 16, 1947*

#### PHYSICS

### Very Accurate Gauges Ground from Spheres

➤ GAUGES for highly accurate measurement of bore-holes are the subject of patent 2,423,094, issued to Dr. I. C. Gardner of the National Bureau of Standards. It is relatively easy to grind spheres of precisely known diameter from such hard stones as agate or from hard glass or fused quartz. From such spheres, cylinders or polygonal prisms may be cut, each retaining at its opposite ends a part of the original, accurately determined diameter. These constitute the gauges. Rights to manufacture and use are assigned royalty-free to the government.

*Science News Letter, August 16, 1947*

The Iowa cornfield thrives partly because its calcium content was high to begin with; the lime came from limestone ledges, ground in the great mill of the Ice Age glaciers or more recently weathered into soil.

#### CHEMISTRY

### Stable Plastic from Rosin

➤ ROSIN is polymerized into a firm, chemically stable plastic of high melting-point through the use of the bromine or chlorine salts of mercury as catalysts, in the process on which B. L. Hampton of Jacksonville, Fla., has been granted patent 2,424,979. These catalysts replace the halides of tin and zinc used in an earlier process. Patent rights are assigned to the Glidden Company of Cleveland.

*Science News Letter, August 16, 1947*

*Male otters* when startled make a noise that resembles the "barking" of a sea lion.

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