

GENERAL SCIENCE

Need Science Commission

A central commission for science and technology has been proposed for the proper administration of the sharply criticized Federal science programs—By Charles A. Betts

► **ESTABLISHMENT** of a new Commission on Science and Technology is called for in a current Senate Committee report sharply critical of the Federal Government's administration of its science programs.

Specifically, the draft report, being considered by the Committee on Government Operations, states that "Federal science activities continue to duplicate and overlap, are inefficient, inadequately coordinated, and continue to be disorganized." The proposed report has not yet been approved.

According to Walter L. Reynolds, chief clerk and staff director, committee action will be forthcoming soon. The report accompanies S. 1136, the bill to create a 12-member commission.

Sen. John L. McClellan (D-Ark.), committee chairman, is on the record as a strong supporter of an in-depth study of how the executive branch is running the nation's scientific effort.

The report brings out opposition testimony on a similar proposal three years ago by the Bureau of the Budget and the director of the National Science Foundation. This testimony was to the effect that the appointment of a director of the Office of Science and Technology in the President's office made the executive "fully qualified to cope with the disorganized Federal science programs."

The testimony of three years ago, the report continues, claimed that if action was delayed another two years there would be no need for Congress to concern itself.

Despite this assurance, the present report maintains, "the basic deficiencies remain and corrective measures designed to reorganize these programs and activities and their administration are more urgently needed than ever before."

In addition to its criticism of structure and procedures of the Federal science programs, the report also raps their administrators in a blanket indictment.

"It may be that those officials having responsibilities in these areas have been so close to the subject for so long a period of time that they are unable to view them objectively. Thus, over the years, the status quo has been maintained, at an annual cost of \$15 billion in the past three years, for which the American taxpayer is not receiving full value."

The proposed commission would be selected as follows:

The President would pick four members, two from private life and two from the executive branch of the Government.

The Vice President would pick four members, two from private life and two from the Senate.

The Speaker of the House of Representatives would pick four members, two from private life and two from the House.

The bill charges the proposed commission with the responsibility of studying and analyzing the overall science effort of the Government, the possibility of a Department of Science, and with recommending additional legislation, if necessary.

Meanwhile, on the House side of the Capitol, other developments forecast a continuing scrutiny of the Federal role in science.

Dr. John R. Dunning, Dean, Columbia University's engineering school, proposed that the President's Office of Science and Technology be elevated to Cabinet rank.

Such a department would clip the authority and the budgets of a host of existing agencies: the Space Agency; Federal Aviation Agency; Health, Education and Welfare; and Defense, to name a key few.

It is unrealistic to expect that bureaucratic empire builders will play dead while their authority is stripped and handed over to a new department.

The suggestion for such an agency has a strong opponent in Rep. George P. Miller (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Committee on Space and Astronautics. Congressman Miller is on record as stating that a Department of Science is unnecessary at this time.

Moreover, what started out as a friendly little look at the functions of the National Science Foundation by Mr. Miller's committee now takes on the overtones of a real inquiry. The committee is expected to conduct an in-depth survey to determine whether the NSF is doing its job efficiently.

One other complicating factor that will be felt in Congress is the attitude of private business. The business community, not at all impotent in legislative influence, is on record through its national associations as feeling strongly that the Federal role in science should be curtailed and more funds be made available to private research organizations.

• Science News Letter, 88:20 July 10, 1965

TECHNOLOGY

'Computermobile' Shared By Several Projects

► A "COMPUTERMOBILE" that travels from one research laboratory to another is helping scientists answer questions while the experiment is going on.

The computer, which is permanently housed in its own 40-foot trailer, is being used on various nuclear research projects within the Brookhaven National Laboratory's 3,700-acre site. The computer can be disconnected by electricians at one location and plugged in at a new site within minutes. Called the PDP-6 computer, it was built by the Digital Equipment Corporation, Maynard, Mass.

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