

House orders monthly review for NSF

The National Science Foundation last week received its toughest grilling in years at the hands of the House of Representatives. What began as a routine debate on NSF's annual budget quickly became an attack by conservatives on a Foundation-sponsored social studies program. The debate ended with passage of an amendment that would require monthly review—in advance—by both houses of Congress, of *all* NSF grant proposals.

For years, conservatives in many parts of the country have opposed both subject matter and intent of a social science course for fifth and sixth graders, called "Man: A Course of Study" (MACOS), developed by the Educational Development Corporation of Newton, Mass., with NSF money. By describing savage practices of primitive cultures, they argued, the course undermines the children's training in the American way of life.

The House Science and Technology Committee, concerned that NSF-developed curricula have sometimes languished because of inadequate follow-up efforts, specifically instructed NSF to pursue a more aggressive implementation program. But when NSF responded by sharply cutting its royalty demands, so that MACOS would appear more attractive to publishers, Rep. John B. Conlan (R-Ariz.) rose to condemn public subsidization of "morally sick texts."

The aim of MACOS, he told his colleagues on the floor of the House April 9, was to "mold children's social attitudes and beliefs along lines that set them apart and alienate them from the beliefs and moral values of their parents and local communities," and replace these values with "the new world society envisioned by an elite group of scholars who have developed and promoted MACOS and similar school materials." Specifically, he opposed discussion of such customs as infanticide and wife-swapping, practiced by the Netsilik Eskimos, and a film showing the Eskimos eating the eyes and drinking the blood of animals they had killed for food. He proposed an amendment that would require Congressional approval before NSF could implement or market any course it developed.

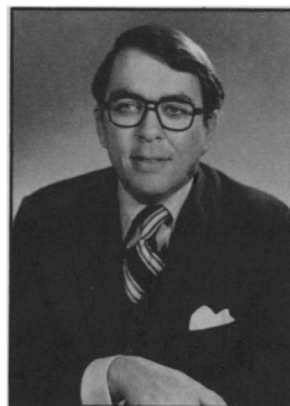
Rising in opposition was Rep. James W. Symington (D-Mo.) who said the amendment would effectively make the Congressional oversight committees into a "joint committee of censorship." If local school boards don't want to use the MACOS materials, fine, nobody is making them, he said. As for the appropriateness of the books and films involved, Symington said he had watched six hours of MACOS films and concluded they contained nothing worse

than he had witnessed as a boy on his grandfather's farm, watching "how they dispatched hogs before the bacon could be made available."

The amendment was narrowly defeated, as was another that would have required posting a "public notice" in a community before NSF could introduce a new curriculum there. But then Rep. Robert E. Bauman (R-Md.) brought up the matter of NSF money going to what some call "ridiculous" research and offered an amendment that would not only control development and implementation of curricula, but give Congress tighter rein over the Foundation's whole grant-giving machinery. It would require a monthly list of proposed grants, "all facts, circumstances and considerations relating to or bearing upon the decision" of NSF to approve the grants, and a discussion of "the manner in which the national interest will be fostered" by their approval. Either house of Congress would have 30 days to pass a resolution that could kill "all or any number" of the grants listed.

Having argued most of the afternoon, the representatives began to get a little "slap-happy," in the words of an aide, and the discussion rapidly degenerated. Rep. Charles A. Mosher (R-Ohio) pointed out to Bauman that none of the grants for questionable research he had listed had come from NSF. Symington then pounced on one example Bauman had objected to—a \$70,000 grant to study perspiration of Australian aborigines—and said that this research had been done under Department of Defense auspices to save American lives in Vietnam. To the accompaniment of much applause, Rep. William J. Randall (D-Mo.) said the amendment would finally give Congress "a little control over these faceless, nameless bureaucrats." Following several more minutes of debate in the same vein, the amendment passed by a 13-vote margin.

What remains unresolved, of course, is how Congress could begin to adequately review the 14,000 grants, out of 30,000 proposals, NSF makes each year. At the Foundation, it takes about 1,200 people working all year to do it. Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.), who will chair committee hearings on the whole NSF bill next week, has stated his strong opposition to the Bauman amendment: "For members of Congress to act as censors over the recommendations of a peer review system which includes over 40,000 qualified and independent members of the scientific community, poses a serious threat to the integrity of this nation's academic and research enterprise." Even science gadfly Sen. William Proxmire (D-Wis.),



Bauman



Conlan

who has so strongly questioned the value of many grants (SN: 3/15/75, p. 165), says he has no desire to "become a grant administrator" and will oppose the amendment.

Meanwhile, Bauman remains optimistic. His press aide, Alan Bock, told SCIENCE NEWS Bauman feels Congress does have the capacity to conduct the necessary reviews. "It's easier to review somebody else's work than do it." And when asked if the same review procedure might later be imposed on other grant-making agencies, like the National Institutes of Health, he replied, "I imagine so."

Even before the House debate, NSF Director H. Guyford Stever had written a letter to Science and Technology Chairman Olin E. Teague (D-Tex.), saying that because of "concerns expressed on all sides of several issues" further obligation of fiscal 1975 funds for MACOS will cease immediately and no 1976 funds, once appropriated, will be spent on *any* precollege science course development or implementation, until a special panel could review all NSF efforts in this area. In addition, Teague is setting up his own review panel to examine NSF's curriculum implementation, in general, and MACOS, in particular. SCIENCE NEWS learned that Teague will announce shortly the appointment of Texas Christian University President James M. Moudy as chairman of that review panel. Meanwhile, faced, in effect, with a House vote of no confidence, all NSF officials are remaining silent on the matter. □