

Political Winds Still Buffeting NSF

Fueled by an intense letter-writing campaign by conservative political organizations, the push to make the National Science Foundation more responsive to the whim of Congress, particularly in the area of science education, continues unabated. At first, few scientists took seriously the threat of direct Congressional involvement in the grant-giving process, but the chairman of the House Science and Technology Committee, Olin E. Teague (D-Tex.), has now promised that when House conferees meet with their Senatorial counterparts to iron out differences in the NSF budget, they will "insist" on acceptance of the so-called "Bauman amendment" (SN: 4/19/75, p. 253).

The pledge came during long-delayed House debate last week over whether conferees should be allowed even to accept a compromise on the issue. As expected, Rep. Robert E. Bauman (R-Md.) moved that they should be bound strictly to the amendment that bears his name—providing that all NSF grants be subjected to prior Congressional approval, on a monthly basis, and that justification be provided showing how each proposed research project would "serve the national interest." Bauman described the amendment as "sunshine" legislation, designed to "bring the activities of this particular executive branch agency out in the open." He said that those who insist Congress has neither the expertise nor time for detailed grant reviewing have often displayed a "disturbing air of superiority bordering on arrogance."

As chairman of the committee that originated the NSF budget authorization bill, Teague finds himself in a politically dangerous position: On the one hand, it is his place to defend the committee's judgment that Congress should not be put in the position of having to prejudge the worth of highly technical research proposals; on the other hand, it is understood that he is under intense political pressure from constituents in his conservative East Texas district. When "science" was equated with new funds to run space installations in Texas there was no problem, but after intense publicity over "frivolous" research (SN: 3/15/75, p. 165) and a campaign to stop implementation of science education courses that one conservative publication said "manipulate unsuspecting school children into rejecting long-established moral values," pressure began to mount. Thus, during last week's floor debate, Teague merely asked that the conferees not be formally bound to the Bauman amendment, while infor-

mally promising to defend it. He left the hard in-fighting on the issue to Rep. Abner J. Mikva (D-Ill.), who charged that Congressional grant reviewing would "de-mean the legislative process." Eventually Bauman's motion to "instruct" the conferees was defeated.

But the delay over appointing conferees led to a peculiar parliamentary impasse: Even if the House and Senate agree to drop the Bauman amendment and restore the original committee authorizations, NSF would still be unable to get the funds it requested for implementing its new science courses, for the House Appropriations Committee has dropped *all* funds for "instructional improvement implementation," thus leap-frogging the whole issue. That, of course, is where the whole problem began—conservative opposition to an NSF-sponsored social studies course called MACOS (Man: A Course of Study)—and subsequent attempts to smooth over this controversy have gotten nowhere.

Prodded by Congress to review its whole pre-college curriculum activities, NSF has issued a study that promises to please no one, though it stands as a minor classic of bureaucratise. (Rather than having ideas for new curricula generated by some specific group within the scholarly community, the report notes: "A more normal competitive solicitation procedure, if instituted, could result in more focused delineation of specific needs, more definitive short- and long-term planning and should elicit more detailed, and in some instances . . . etc.") One educator said the report "wallows in inaccuracies"; conservatives believe it doesn't go far enough. Rep. John B. Conlan (R-Ariz.) accuses NSF of "suppressing" documents on its peer review procedures dealing with curriculum development and "stonewalling" to cover up its mistakes.

A "small, impartial review group" appointed by Teague to study the question and report back to the Science and Technology Committee no later than May 31 had to ask for a month's extension, and SCIENCE NEWS has learned that the panel will not be able to complete its work until the end of July, at the earliest. This means that whatever guidelines they might adopt on how new science courses should be introduced into the nation's schools could not have any impact until Congress decides to consider the whole issue again.

Faced with organized opposition from politically sophisticated conservative organizations and under pressure from an increasingly skeptical Congress, the scientific community has responded, so far, with characteristic apathy. The issue, in

one scientist's phrase, is whether research will become a "pork barrel project," but he admits there has been little action among scientists "to set the story straight." Probably the most outspoken defense of NSF's educational programs has come not from the various scientific establishments in Washington but from Rep. James W. Symington (D-Mo.), who replies to criticism that MACOS treats the grim realities of Eskimo life too candidly by saying, "There is more criminal violence in one night of television than an Eskimo would encounter in a lifetime."

Chances of having the Bauman amendment become law are still slim, and new methods of implementing science curriculum projects can always be worked out, but NSF is unlikely to come out of the current confrontation unscathed, and many scientists may belatedly find that both their freedom and their funding have suffered while they stood by unawares. □

Ray quits State science post

Dixie Lee Ray, the outspoken chairperson of the Atomic Energy Commission until its metamorphosis early this year (SN: 1/25/75, p. 55), has now resigned her State Department post as the first Assistant Secretary for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES). She left with a blast at the State Department bureaucracy—and by implication, Secretary of State Kissinger—for not allowing OES to fulfill its "statutory responsibilities."

Ray is understood to have been unhappy with delegation of some specific policymaking duties to a rival bureau (the State Department's office of Economic and Business Affairs), and to have felt Kissinger was generally not receptive to her advice. Most recently she was irked when the United States prevented a domestic company from selling atomic installations to Brazil only to have the whole business grabbed up by Germany—leaving OES out of the negotiations.

An active supporter of nuclear development at home and abroad, Ray is seriously considering continuing public service through elective politics, possibly running as a Democratic candidate next year for Governor of Washington. In the meantime she intends to elaborate on her reasons for leaving State, in a long letter to the President, and is authoring a book: "Good-bye America." □