Systems Bills in Flux

'Not Quite Right,' Says Nelson.

Pending bills to put aerospace research techniques into the service of social scientists working with earthbound problems will certainly be revised before submission to the full Senate later this session. There seems to be agreement that the approach will work; the question is how fast to move.

The author of the original bill, Senator Gaylord A. Nelson (D-Wis.) concluding the third series of hearings of the proposal, last week said neither bill before his subcommittee was quite right.



Sen. Gaylord A. Nelson

"We'll want to draft a better bill," he said. Nelson's proposal, introduced in October 1965, calls for authority for the Secretary of Labor to give grants totalling no more than \$125 million to states, universities, or other organizations, public or private.

The money would go to developing the use of the "systems analysis" approach to pressing problems such as air and water pollution, crime and delinquency, housing, transportation and waste disposal.

Nelson didn't push his bill in the last Congress because, even after hearings, he felt the systems analysists had not made the importance of their art understandable to either himself or the rest of the Congress.

A second bill, introduced last August by Senator Hugh Scott (R-Pa.) calls for the creation of a commission to spend two-and-a-half years investigating the usefulness of the systems analysis approach to social problems. This is partly a regression to Nelson's old position, and partly what is being called "the Republican bill."

Sen. Nelson suggested there might be a compromise, setting up a commission not just to investigate but to get on with funding of projects. Perhaps a series of regional centers might be set up, he said, to deal with local studies that might be used in other localities.

After hearing favorable testimony from systems analysts themselves, educators, heads of research organizations, and labor representatives, the subcommittee expects not only further hearings in early March, but a data reduction from questionnaires now distributed to officials of all states and the mayors of all cities over 100,000 in population. These questionnaires ask what help toward a systems analysis program they might need, or want, to handle their own problems. Over 50 percent of the officials have already replied.

The answers will be processed through a computer—just as many of the steps of systems analysis are.

Systems analysis, used with great success in designing and building difficult machinery such as ballistic missile systems, might be used to draw up plans for de-polluting the Mississippi River, Sen. Nelson suggested. It could take into account so much data in relation to cost to polluters, values of a clean river, value and cost of pesticide pollution and so on, that computers would be necessary to process it.

In the pollution example, the final decision on abatement steps would be made by politicians as is now the case. But a fuller range of possibilities and better information on all the effects to flow from their decision would be before them.

Pioneer studies in California indicate that the systems technique might be used in helping to fight crime. But to get meaningful data on the roots of criminality would mean enormously long experiments before any analysis of the system would be possible. Such work "would probably take five to 15 years," says D. R. Roberts, vice president for development of the Aerojet General Corp., which did the study on crime for California.

A representative of the aerospace workers could not testify in person as to why his group backed the Nelson bill. He was grounded by snow in De-

"What we need," said his substitute reading the statement, "is a better system for getting a man from Detroit to Washington."

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