All Those In Favor

There is an important difference between the major bills for federal support of education now being considered by Congress and those that have been introduced in former years. In general—and of course there are exceptions—the major current bills emphasize improvement of quality, while earlier ones emphasized funds for school construction and for general purposes. Thus both the Administration bill and the Hill-Elliott bill (see analysis and comparison of these bills in Science, p. 389, 21 Feb. 1958) provide funds, in some cases with matching funds provided by the states, for the employment of additional teachers of science and mathematics or the improvement of salaries of teachers in these fields, for the employment of consultants or supervisors to improve teaching in science and mathematics, for help to teachers who wish to improve their knowledge of the subjects they are teaching, for the purchase of laboratory equipment, and for scholarships and fellowships for superior students.

Most of these provisions are of interest to the large number of scientists who are concerned with improving our educational system. Yet relatively few scientists have expressed their interest effectively as far as members of Congress are concerned. There are two easy explanations. First, only recently has general information concerning the major bills been widely available. Second, it is not the custom of the scientific community to "write to your Congressman." From the Congressman's standpoint, however, the lack of expression of interest means lack of interest. Members of Congress are quite ready to say that they depend to a considerable extent upon the voluntary expressions of interest and advice they receive from their constituents and that they find these expressions a useful guide in deciding what is desirable and what is wanted by the informed members of the public. In fact, several members of Congress have made it clear that they would like very much to receive more advice from persons who are well informed concerning educational and scientific matters.

At present, probably the most useful advice would concern general principles to be observed in legislation and the types of federal support that would be most desirable. There is not yet any bill ready for vote, and, for that matter, the bills that will be voted on have probably not yet been written. After the conclusion of hearings that are now being held, it is likely that the responsible committees will write new bills based upon those already submitted but modified on the basis of information and advice received during the hearings or in correspondence. When these bills have been written, it will be appropriate to express endorsement or criticism of specific bills or provisions of those bills.