

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE

Science serves its readers as a forum for the presentation and discussion of important issues related to the advancement of science, including the presentation of minority or conflicting points of view, rather than by publishing only material on which a consensus has been reached. Accordingly, all articles published in *Science*—including editorials, news and comment, and book reviews—are signed and reflect the individual views of the authors and not official points of view adopted by the AAAS or the institutions with which the authors are affiliated.

Editorial Board

ROBERT L. BOWMAN	EVERETT I. MENDELSON
JOSEPH W. CHAMBERLAIN	NEAL E. MILLER
JOHN T. EDSALL	JOHN R. PIERCE
EMIL HAURY	KENNETH S. PITZER
ALEXANDER HOLLAENDER	ALEXANDER RICH
WILLARD F. LIBBY	DEWITT STEITEN, JR.
GORDON J. F. MACDONALD	CLARENCE M. ZENER

Editorial Staff

Editor

PHILIP H. ABELSON

<i>Publisher</i>	<i>Business Manager</i>
DAEL WOLFE	HANS NUSSBAUM

Managing Editor: ROBERT V. ORMES

Assistant Editors: ELLEN E. MURPHY, JOHN E. RINGLE

Assistant to the Editor: NANCY TEIMOURIAN

News Editor: DANIEL S. GREENBERG

News and Comment: JOHN WALSH,* ELINOR LANGER, LUTHER J. CARTER, BRYCE NELSON, GILIAN PARRILLO, JOAN ANDERSON

Book Reviews: SYLVIA EBERHART

Editorial Assistants: JOANNE BELK, ISABELLA BOULDIN, ELEANORE BUTZ, BEN CARLIN, CAROLYN CLARK, GRAYCE FINGER, NANCY HAMILTON, OLIVER HEATWOLE, ANNE HOLDSWORTH, KONSLYN-NIETTA HUTCHINSON, ELEANOR JOHNSON, PAULA LECKY, KATHERINE LIVINGSTON, LEAH RYAN, BARBARA SHEFFER

**European Office:* Lime Tree Farm, East Hagbourne, Berkshire, England. Telephone Didcot 3317

Advertising Staff

<i>Director</i>	<i>Production Manager</i>
EARL J. SCHERAGO	ROSE MARIE ROMAGNOLO
<i>Advertising Sales Manager:</i> RICHARD L. CHARLES	
Sales: New York, N.Y., 11 W. 42 St. (212-PE-6-1858): ROBERT S. BUGBEE	
Scotch Plains, N.J., 12 Unami Lane (201-889-4873): C. RICHARD CALLIS	
Medfield, Mass. 02052, 4 Rolling Lane (617-359-2370): RICHARD M. EZEQUELLE	
Chicago, Ill. 60611, 919 N. Michigan Ave., Room 426 (312-DE-7-4973): HERBERT L. BURKLUND	
Los Angeles 45, Calif., 8255 Beverly Blvd. (213-653-9817): WINN NANCE	

EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE: 1515 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. 20005. Phone: 202-387-7171. Cable: Advancesci, Washington. Copies of "Instructions for Contributors" can be obtained from the editorial office. ADVERTISING CORRESPONDENCE: Rm. 1740, 11 W. 42 St., New York, N.Y. 10036. Phone: 212-PE 6-1858.

A Partisan Attack on Research

Congressmen serving on committees dealing with aspects of research and development generally become knowledgeable about their areas of responsibility. As a result, they are often well disposed toward support of scientific research. However, as politicians they cannot afford to be so partisan as to become vulnerable. They must take into account tides of public opinion and matters likely to affect opinion, such as articles in mass-circulation magazines.

Several congressmen have commented privately on the adverse impact on their constituents of an article entitled "The great research boondoggle," which appeared recently in a monthly publication. As a partisan document, the article is a triumph. Research is confused with development, and the reader is left with the impression that the annual cost of government-supported research is \$16 billion. Then research is downgraded by citation of examples likely to seem ridiculous to the reader and by skillful choice of guilt-connoting words—such phrases as "federal research craze," "complex jungle of federal research," "sprawling research program," "research bug," "lucrative contracts," "profitable parasite industry," and "getting fat at the public trough."

In the article 12 specific government-supported projects are cited as examples. Most of these involve the social sciences, which receive a tiny fraction of the funds. For example, the article quotes Senator Proxmire as attacking the National Institutes of Health as a "worst offender" for supporting projects designated "A Social History of French Medicine, 1789–1815" (\$11,782); "Emergence of Political Leadership: Indians in Fiji" (\$10,917); and "Changing Patterns of [Moslem] Family Life" (\$28,755).

Similarly, the Department of Agriculture was cited for spending 5 years "revising pickle standards." The Office of Education drew mention in an unfavorable context because it supported research on "understanding the fourth-grade slump in creative thinking."

A knowledgeable observer might smile at so much ado about so little. However, a less astute reader could be left with the impression that a large fraction of NIH and other federal funds is spent in irrelevant areas.

No enterprise supported by the federal government should be free of criticism. Research is no exception. Some scientists have questioned aspects of the science establishment with the goal of making government expenditures more effective. It is desirable that such self-policing continue. However, the article in question illustrates a cost of public self-criticism. It seems very damaging when it quotes a prominent scientist out of context as saying that federal support has encouraged "shoddy, redundant, uncritical and ill-conceived research." The article is also very damaging when it quotes a professor of chemistry at a large university as saying that government support of research is "potentially the most powerful destructive force the higher educational system has ever faced."

Congressmen can easily judge the validity of magazine articles. Politicians, however, cannot be expected to assume all the burden of setting the record straight. Scientists must help ensure that the public has an accurate understanding of what it is getting for its money.

—PHILIP H. ABELSON