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National Science Policy

OVER the past several months I have talked to many scientists from all parts of the country, and I have been struck by their interest in the plans of the National Science Foundation for developing national science policy. In its basic legislation the foundation is given definite directives in this area.

Scientists, however, are not alone in their interest in the science policy phases of the program. In his 1953 Budget Message the President said,

The National Science Foundation has been established as the government agency responsible for a continuing analysis of the whole national endeavor in basic research, including the evaluation of the research programs of other Federal agencies. On the basis of studies now under way, the Foundation will formulate a broad national policy designed to assure that the scope and the quality of basic research in this country are adequate for national security and technological progress.

The Congress also has expressed interest in the policy phase of the foundation's activities. In the hearings before the Appropriations Committees of both houses members repeatedly ask about this aspect of the foundation's plans and program.

Success in developing national science policy, in finding the most likely avenues of progress in science, in assessing our research needs, and in over-all analysis of our present research activity will depend in the first instance on scientists themselves. No one else has their intimate knowledge of what science is and should be doing, or their understanding and insight into the nature of the problems of research.

The foundation, therefore, must find appropriate methods for bringing this special knowledge to bear upon its developing policies. We have gone about this in several ways. Members of the divisional committees have been chosen for both their breadth and depth of understanding of science and its relation to other aspects of our national life. For advisory consultants we have drawn upon many of America's foremost scientists, who have had wide experience in teaching

and research, and many of whom have been associated with industrial and government research as well. At the present time we are discussing with a leading society a plan, proposed by the society itself, to review the present and potential research activities in its field, to survey its trained manpower resources, and to study the relationship of this field to science and education in general. No matter how this particular study may be carried out, we believe that from such pilot studies may come definite techniques for utilizing the ideas of scientists in building a strong national research policy.

Development of policy for federally supported basic research programs is fully as difficult. Existing programs have not grown haphazardly. They have a definite reason for being, usually closely tied to the operating responsibilities of the agencies. Adjustments in these programs must be made in light of these responsibilities. At the same time, we dare not devote our entire national research capacity exclusively to these specific ends, however urgent they may appear to be. It is here that the foundation is expected to make well-thought-out, systematic policy decisions.

Some forward steps have been taken. The 1953 federal budget estimates contain certain adjustments in the research budgets of the various agencies. The proposed increase from \$1.4 to \$8.8 million for research support by the foundation was taken into account in arriving at recommendations for basic research programs for the Department of Defense and other agencies. Similar care was taken in preparing the graduate fellowship estimates.

In initiating or recommending actions relating to national policy the foundation assumes great responsibility for making sure that the research requirements of the nation are met. Our goals must be wisely selected and attainable, and we must see to it that nonscientists everywhere, including those in the Congress, understand the need and urgency of their achievement.

ALAN T. WATERMAN

National Science Foundation

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