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Scientists and the NSF

ON MAY 10, 1950, the President signed the bill which thereby became the National Science Foundation Act of 1950. This marked the beginning of a new chapter in the history of science in America. The act established an instrumentality which, if adequate support for its activities is provided, can effectively work toward the realization of the ideals and objectives set forth in the Bush report, *Science the Endless Frontier*, published in July 1945.

The operating agency, as distinguished from the National Science Board, completed its first year on April 6, the anniversary date of the appointment of Alan T. Waterman as director. Its operations during the present fiscal year are on a necessarily modest scale with a budget of \$3,500,000. Within the limitations thus set, activities are under way in assembling the staff to carry out the prescribed functions, to develop policies through the National Science Board, to prepare plans and procedures by which the staff may best accomplish its tasks, and to establish the support for basic research and education in the sciences through grants and fellowships.

There is strong emphasis in the act, and in the activities to carry out its provisions, on fundamental research with complete freedom of choice—research motivated by intellectual curiosity. Being a federal agency specifically directed by statute to support basic research and education in science, one of its most important purposes is to assure that we shall add substantially to knowledge of all the sciences, the extent of which so profoundly affects our economy, our security, and our social structure.

The foundation was created for, and belongs to, the people of the United States. It is in its infancy. Its nurture is the duty of scientists, so that it may realize its potentialities, and become the means for maintaining and increasing our sources of fundamental knowl-

edge. Scientists who believe in this impressively conceived experiment can help achieve success by keeping themselves reminded, and acting upon their convictions, that much of the support of science comes from the public through its legislative bodies; and that the support of the foundation comes specifically by way of annual appropriations made by the Congress.

Sustained and continuous education of the public and of its representatives on the significance of science and on the purposes of the National Science Foundation is essential in a country such as ours, where applications of science play so vital a part in everyday life. The task of the National Science Board and the foundation's staff will be greatly eased and the results of their efforts more fully assured if scientists will consider it their duty to participate in these educational activities. Such an endeavor is logically a part of the broader objective of bringing the knowledge of science to the public which, in the Arden House statement regarding the future of the AAAS, is declared to be an essential activity of scientists in the United States.

Ours is a practical-minded nation. It has become increasingly so through the technological successes prior to and during World War II. Developments out of existing knowledge cannot go on indefinitely without replenishment of the store of knowledge. There is possibility, indeed probability, that if, as now, most of our scientists apply their genius primarily to practical ends, we shall find ourselves drifting into a situation in which we may be thwarted as creators of knowledge. We may lose the cultural values that are inherent in the science areas of learning.

Preserving these values is as much our business as is our professional occupation in the classroom and the laboratory. The medium of accomplishment, the National Science Foundation, is at hand. Its future depends on the scientists of the country.

PAUL E. KLOPSTEG

National Science Foundation

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