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Stanford Accelerator Again

Approval by the White House two years ago of plans to build the world's largest linear accelerator completed a chapter in the efforts to finance this instrument, but did not complete the book. The accelerator would be built at Stanford University and the cost is now put at \$114 million. Responsibility for the program was assigned to the Atomic Energy Commission, but efforts to get the Joint Congressional Atomic Energy Committee to approve funds for construction have so far proved unsuccessful and the matter is now again before the committee. To assure a balanced research program in the face of such costly instruments, the White House science advisers had developed the theory that administrative planning for this and comparable expected expenditures should be carried out at an interagency, inter-departmental level. This was done, but with the assignment of the program to the AEC and the consequent need for approval by the Joint Committee, the program has got caught up in questions not directly related to the assessment of our research requirements

In the Joint Committee's deliberations last year, for example, some Democrats were prepared to be unenthusiastic about funds for construction of the accelerator to the extent that they experienced opposition to their own plans to provide the nuclear power reactor at Hanford, Washington, with generating equipment. The electricity produced would be used in the public power program of the Bonneville Power Administration. Democrats on the committee were also reluctant to provide Nixon, then Vice-President, with campaign opportunities in the form of ground-breaking ceremonies. There was also some lack of a sense of urgency for the accelerator in the AEC itself, perhaps because of resentment at being told what to do by people outside the commission.

These factors were, it is true, only in the background. In the foreground was the Joint Committee's concern with the proper assessment of our research needs. If the Eisenhower Administration took several years to convince itself of the wisdom of this expenditure, we should not be surprised that a Congressional committee finds it necessary to convince itself in turn. Questions still under consideration include: How much high-energy physics do we need? Does the Stanford accelerator best meet this need? What relationship will exist between Stanford and the AEC? Putting the foreground against the background, the result of last year's deliberations was that, although no money was provided for construction, \$3 million was forthcoming for studies preliminary to construction. Since these studies had to be made in any event, the claim was that this small appropriation would not actually delay the program.

As matters stand this year, generating equipment for the Hanford power reactor is in the Kennedy budget, the political campaign is over, and the accelerator, according to informed sources, has been delayed about 6 months. The AAAS, incidentally, has participated in this seeking of funds, if only by providing a bit of the scenery. The original announcement by Eisenhower that he favored the accelerator was made at a AAAS symposium on the support of basic research and obstacles to that support. These particular obstacles now seem to have dissolved, although perhaps a different strategy by the Administration might have avoided them in the first place. The chances are that when the Joint Committee makes its report to Congress, probably by the end of this month, it will recommend funds for construction.—J.T.

Science

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