House challenges NSF funds

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less.“ The publicity — which the NSF staff member said “comes in cycles, every couple of years” — has included a number of articles in national magazines and newspapers criticizing NSF grants funding studies of why people fall in love, curricular grants funding studies of why people fall off bicycles, and why people fall off bicycles, among others.

One such attack was launched by Sen. William Proxmire (D-Wis) against the MIT Innovation Center, an engineering center that helps student and faculty inventors develop their inventions and market them. Proxmire charged that the center used NSF funds to set students up in business allowing them to make a profit using Federal money.

“Wherever one of these articles appears,” Bauman said on the floor of the House, “you get a large volume of letters asking why the government spends money on such projects, and why we Congressmen do not do something about it.”

“Natural progression”

One item that received a great deal of attention in Congress was the recent funding of a social science curriculum for fifth-grade students entitled “Man: A Course of Study,” which has been criticized by many educators. Congressional critics of this program had introduced two amendments to place restrictions on NSF curriculum-development programs — amendments defeated through the efforts of the NSF lobbyists.

Then Bauman proposed his amendment. “It was almost like a natural progression, one after the other,” the NSF staff told The Tech. Another NSF lobbyist told the Chronicle of Higher Education: “It seemed an incredible groundswell building up. People were getting up and making statements, and other people were cheering and yelling and clapping. It was clear they were trying to get rid of their frustrations.”

After what the Chronicle termed “a flood of anti-academic rhetoric,” the Bauman amendment was passed by a vote of 212 to 199.

Opposition

The proposal, however, received almost immediate opposition from members of both the House and the Senate, including many members of the committees which oversee the Foundation.

“We quite clear that his (Bauman’s) amendment has virtually no chance of getting through the Senate on the subcommittee or committee level,” A. Kennedy told The Tech.

Although Bauman is reportedly seeking a Senate sponsor to support the amendment during floor debate, Kennedy will also fight the measure in the Senate-House conference committee.

“The Proxmire way of making NSF more efficient,” said Robert Mills, a member of Proxmire’s staff, “would be to cut the budget and force them to re-adjust their priorities.”

“Bauman has good intentions, and shares concerns of many of the members on both ends of the political spectrum,” Mills said. “But the mechanism of his plan just aren’t workable.”

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