Congress and NSF: more than headlines

By Michael McNamee

Unfavorable publicity is something with which the National Science Foundation has learned to live. "It comes in cycles, every couple of years," said one Congressional liaison aide. After Congressional fiascos earlier this month made NSF its "first victim," the agency remains "amazed" by the velocity with which public concern caused by the latest cycle of "zany grant" publicity, has finally hit. The agency is in the process of budgetary wrangling over the Foundation's expense.

Congress is divided into two types of Congressmen who contribute to the Foundation's headaches. The first is the fast-headlines-grabber who delegates a staff member to scan the listing of NSF grants, which he hopes to remove and replace. Sen. William "crazy" titles. The Congressmen then calls NSF, gets a couple of conference calls from the agencies before a speech of three to five to three sleep representatives, and 17 pages who are playing tic-tac-toe in the corner before issuing the release about how NSF is wasting money.

The release is always printed, because newspapers like those three-paragraph filler items - "brightness," as they're called. The hopefully-conservative papers that most people read "Out There" elevate the press release to editorial comment on the productivity of the federal government. Standard Editorial Topic No. 15, The Congressmen gets a lot of letters - far-right conservatives always write more letters than they can send out - as, for example, suppose that one representative became interested recently because of NSF-sponsored research on NBC. He didn't know what was up, and neither did his constituents, he said; and once his constituents were convinced that it was only a long way away from the earth, they weren't going to want to fund any egressive work on that, and neither would be. No one has asked him yet if his constituents have ever been seen in the sometimes accidental democracy below.

What is probably the worst problem, neither type of Congressman understands the difference between different kinds of research. They all want research that can show a profit, that can produce profitably near-term. They do not want, for example, a story about the Congressman who was told that only 20 percent of all basic research produced applications, and therefore insisted that it because we need the money? Does not MIT's stance imply that we condone such policies? We worry about contributing to potential nuclear proliferation. We worry about contributing to potential nuclear proliferation. We worry about potential nuclear proliferation. Are there any conditions under which we would not train the best brains of another nation? Where are any conditions under which MIT would refuse a contract? Should not some apparatus of responsibility be set up in our academic community to address this problem, and examine the implications of contracts with governments? The independent academic and moral integrity of MIT needs no superfluous; what we have had. The circumstances of the present demand it.

Rev. John Crocker, Jr. Rabbi Mel Gottlieb

The Tech welcomes Letters to the Editor. Typed letters must be signed, names will be withheld upon request. Send Letters to The Tech, 2W-483.

Letters to The Tech

What principles on Iran?

To the Editor:

I would like to con- net the reporting of my recent talk at MIT. Far from asserting that "it is unfearable for Iran to use its growing potential for weapons production," I pointed out that when Iran's first four pro- jected nuclear reactors became operational - that is, those four reactors for which firm contracts have been signed, with France, and West Germany - Iran will be able to produce about a bomb a day if it should choose to do so. I also emphasized the many concurrent steps Iran was taking to overcome its present lack of technically trained people so that when these reactors are operational (which I estimate to be in about 10 years), the Middle East will possess either for nuclear energy or nuclear weapons production capability. I was available. I concluded that in my opinion Iran is keeping its options open, trying to acquire self-sufficiency in all steps of the fuel cycle so that if it chooses to pursue a nuclear weapons option in the 1980s, it will be in a position to do so, and that I feared it would choose to do so.

Anne Cahn

April 28, 1975

Bureaucracy

To the Editor:

I thought I might share with you one of the gems of bureaucratic trivia in which MIT pro- duces. The FAC (Fleming Ad- ministration Council) recently sent all freshmen a Course Selection Card which we were meant to fill in. I did so, except for the third box which was for those who had not yet decided what courses they were in. The third box was for those who had not yet decided whether or not they would declare which course they were in. There was no box for those who were unsure of how to decide whether or not to decide what course they were in. Let's not annoy anyone tell the FAC doesn't have a sense of humor.

Robert J. Ferson

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