Retirement bill debated

By Brian Aelio

A bill proposed by the House Committee on Education and Welfare to raise the mandatory retirement age from 65 to 70 could have several effects at MIT. The legislation, which would affect employees of both private organizations and state and local governments, was proposed as an amendment to the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967.

Several conflicting views have been expressed about the bill regarding its application to university professors. At the present time most administrators have neglected to comment on the bill. Those who favor raising the retirement age to 70 note that the average age in the United States has increased and that older people are more productive now than they had been in the past. Therefore, if a professor over 65 is still capable of teaching, he should be able to continue teaching. A problem arises when an individual is no longer qualified to teach but still wants to continue working. What criterion should be established to judge the competence of an older faculty member?

Another consideration favoring the increase in retirement age concerns social security. With more professors working beyond the age of 65 there would be a decreased need for social security. According to Jack N. Ray, director of insurance and retirement benefits at Indiana University, the situation could lead to "economic difficulties" for any institution that had made financial projections based on the retirement of their faculty members at 65 instead of 70. Many universities might not be capable of paying the high salaries of senior professors who in the past would have been replaced by younger professors.

Universities are also fearful of becoming too heavy with senior faculty, which would decrease opportunities for employment and advancement among younger scholars. Dr. Charles Davidson, a retired Harvard professor said, "I'm delighted to be retired," adding that it gave him "some independence" which he had not have as a tenured professor. He also said that "young people should be able to obtain a position" and that people beyond the mandatory retirement age should be able to teach, although in a different way. Just as new professors have new ideas which are important, older professors possess wisdom which has been squired through age. However, there must be some point at which the university can tell the professor to leave.

Professor of Humanities Theodore Wood, Jr. stated that "It would be fine if we weren't required to retire at 65." He noted that professors were formerly employed for half-time at half-pay when they reached the retirement age. Although Wood said he felt this would be great, he realized that it would hurt younger professors: "I can see... their point of view."

The effects of raising the mandatory retirement age to 70 would have a greater impact than would be expected from a survey of all professors, according to the Ladd-Lipset Faculty Survey. The survey indicates that 21 percent of all faculty members in the US (Please turn to page 6)