Obtaining surplus equipment

Each year federal agencies give away millions of dollars of surplus equipment. Excess apparatus and supplies from one agency are first made available to other agencies and departments of the federal government. What is left over amounts to $8–$10 million a year in excess property that the agencies donate to the academic community. The Atomic Energy Commission, for example, donates $5–$6 million a year of such apparatus as cyclotrons, oscilloscopes, power supplies, scintillation counters and computers. More than half of this apparatus is in excellent condition—35% unused and another 35% usable without repairs.

Physicists who want to find out about available equipment for donation should contact their state agency for surplus property (there is one in every state). These state agencies have warehouses filled with surplus federal equipment. Though no lists of apparatus are issued, when a physicist tells his state agent about a desired piece of equipment, the agent will keep the request on record and notify the physicist when such surplus equipment is available.

Inflation and physics

The physics community, which has had to live with higher costs and reduced federal funds in the past, is feeling the effects of an accelerated inflation. Major national laboratories report that increases in standard equipment costs this year are about three times those of past years. Suppliers of physics educational equipment say they can maintain their normal rate of price increase only with difficulty. Physics students will have to pay higher academic charges this year, and physics graduates are being offered higher competitive salaries. As it has in the past, the government is trying to stem the inflation by cutting federal expenditures in the midst of the fiscal year. President Johnson has directed federal agencies to defer their commitments during the current year, an order bound to affect broad areas of physics funding.

Potential physics students now find it more difficult to obtain college tuition money under the government's college-loan program. This program carries a maximum interest rate of 6%, which is also the current prime business rate. Bankers are reluctant to lend money to students at the same rate they lend it to General Motors, especially under terms requiring no repayment until after graduation. Costs of attending college also continue to rise, with three out of four institutions reporting increased student charges (according to a survey by the Life Insurance Agency Management Association). Median academic-year charges at public colleges and universities were $963 for in-state students and $1325

RESONANCES

Tougher sledding for science legislation in the next Congress is expected by many Washington observers in the wake of the November elections. While such key science committee chairmen as Rep. Holifield (D.-Calif.), Rep. Daddario (D.-Conn.) and Rep. Reuss (D.-Wis.) kept their seats, several strong supporters of expanded federal aid to education and research were defeated, including Sen. Douglas (D.-Ill.), Rep. Schmidhauser (D.-Iowa) and Rep. Todd (D.-Mich.). Observers point out that both parties in Congress as well as the administration will reflect the trend of the election pointing to a slowdown in "Great Society" programs.

The only PhD technical scientist in Congress was defeated in his bid for reëlection. Weston E. Vivian (D.-Mich.) lost to Marvin L. Esch in a close race with relatively few ballots cast. Esch received 65 039 votes to Vivian's 62 327. Vivian, who is a member of the House Science and Astronautics Committee, has indicated that he intends to run again in 1968. Cameron B. Satterthwaite, professor of physics at the University of Illinois, lost heavily in his attempt to win a House seat. Though he received only 36.9% of the vote against incumbent Republican William L. Springer, Satterthwaite will try again in 1968.

Defective management of federal research laboratories has been charged by the House Research and Technical Programs Subcommittee, headed by Henry S. Reuss (D.-Wis.). Based on a case study of in-house federal pollution research conducted by the Library of Congress, the subcommittee concluded that the federal government, though it spends nearly $4 billion annually on R&D in its own laboratories, "does not know exactly how many laboratories it has, where they are, what kinds of people work in them or what work they are doing . . . Complete information on projects being undertaken by federal laboratories and cost of those projects is not available."