

editorial

Lost: our voice in Washington

The new year finds the influence of the scientist in Washington affairs decreased to an all-time record low. Our report on page 101 points out that beginning next month not one of the top government posts in science will be filled by a man who made his mark as a scientist. In the past we have taken it for granted that the chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, the President's Science Advisor and the director of NSF would all be prominent scientists, well known for their scientific achievements and respected as influential members of the scientific community. Among the men named by the Administration to these three posts only Edward David is a member of the National Academy of Sciences, and he by background is an electrical engineer who has worked primarily in communications and computer research. Also lacking a background in basic science is William Magruder, recently appointed to a new White House staff position concerned with developing technological opportunities.

In general these men, of course, have strong technical experience and we have no reason to believe that they are not highly able individuals. Our complaint is that none is qualified to function in government circles as a spokesman for the scientific community. The need for such a spokesman is clearly evident in the face of the marked shift of the Federal agencies away from support of basic research in favor of applied projects. Most unfortunately the National Science Foundation itself is participating in this change in emphasis (See "No part-time agency for basic research," May 1971, page 80).

A second move by the administration is equally as depressing and may prove to be even more damaging in the long run. This is the action taken last Fall by the Office of Management and Budget to impound \$32 million of the money already appropriated by Congress in 1972 for NSF's education programs. Leaders in science education view this move as seriously damaging the nation's college-level programs in science, which have been receiving practically all of their support for innovative programs from the NSF. The OMB action caused Lloyd Humphreys,

NSF assistant director of education, to resign in protest. At the time, he predicted still further cuts in the NSF education budget for 1973.

Science programs designed for the nonscience student would appear to be our best hope for reversing the anti-science trend among young people. Now we see this hope jeopardized.

Apparently the embargo on NSF funds fits in with an Administration policy to shift all responsibility for education to HEW and the Office of Education. But these agencies are ill-equipped to carry out the specialized task of science education. And even if this were not so, there is no way to transfer any part of the \$32 million being held up by OMB to these other offices.

This whole episode is particularly embittering because OMB is unilaterally holding back the very funds that Congress had pointedly restored to the NSF appropriation after the Administration had omitted them. This action, taken together with the science-post appointments, makes it appear that the Administration is significantly more bearish on basic science than is Congress or the general public (as reflected in the position of its elected representatives).

A major goal for physicists in 1972 should be to join with our fellow scientists and do everything we can to restore both a voice for science in the Federal government and the funds needed to provide an education in science for the nation's youth.

Harold L. Davis