

The History of Science in the United States

An Encyclopedia

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Simon Baatz

Committee on Science and Technology, United States House of Representatives

A standing congressional committee created in 1958 to oversee federal science, technology, and space programs. As a response to the Soviet launching of *Sputnik* in 1957, it was initially called the House Committee on Science and Astronautics and concentrated on the space program. Over the years, it acquired broader jurisdiction that included all nonmilitary research and development and oversight of the National Aeronautical and Space Administration, the National Science Foundation, the National Bureau of Standards (renamed the National Institute of Standards and Technology in 1988), and the National Weather Service. It changed its name to House Committee on Science and Technology in 1974, as national attention shifted from space to energy and environment; to House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology in 1987, when the space-shuttle program rekindled interest in space; and to House Science Committee in 1995, when the Republican majority in Congress strove to cut back federal involvement in applied research. Overton Brooks (Democrat of Louisiana) chaired the committee from 1959, when it first became operational, to 1961. He was succeeded by five other Democrats, George P. Miller of California (1961–1973), Olin E. Teague of Texas (1973–1979), Don Fuqua of Florida (1979–1987), Robert A. Roe of New Jersey (1987–1991), and George E. Brown Jr. of California (1991–1995), and two Republicans, Robert S. Walker of Pennsylvania (1995–1996), and F. James Sensenbrenner of Wisconsin (1996–). Among the committee's legislative achievements were the establishment of the congressional Office of Technology Assessment in 1972 and the passage of the National Science and Technology Policy, Organization and Priorities Act of 1976, which created the White House Office of

Science and Technology Policy. The committee's fight against pork-barrel science funding has met, however, with limited success.

While official histories of the committee praised it for providing Congress a much-needed mechanism to deal with science and technology policy, others have criticized it for boosterism for the space program and other scientific and technological projects. Unfortunately, few detailed examinations and no full-length, critical history of the committee by historians of science and technology exist. The records of the committee are in the National Archives.

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Zuoyue Wang

SEE ALSO

Federal Government, Science and

Compton, Arthur Holly (1892–1962)

Experimental physicist and science administrator. The son of a college professor in Wooster, Ohio, Compton developed an early interest in astronomy and aviation, and built his own telescope and model airplanes, including a glider which could carry him several hundred feet. He was educated at Wooster College, where he did his first work with X-rays, discovered by Wilhelm Roentgen in 1895. His older brother, Karl T. Compton, was interested in physics, and preceded him to Princeton, where both pursued graduate studies in physics. He soon focused upon matter and radiation, and studied the properties of thermionic and photoelectric emission with O.W. Richardson. He collaborated with his brother in the design of a sensitive electrometer which was widely marketed. Compton began his career as an instructor at the University of Minnesota before accepting a position as an industrial research engineer at Westinghouse Lamp Company in 1917. The use of physicists in such positions expanded