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HEARINGS
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE AND ASTRONAUTICS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
EIGHTY-NINTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

ON

S. 774

JANUARY 18, 1966

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THE METRIC STUDY BILL

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HEARINGS

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THE METRIC STUDY BILL

TUESDAY, JANUARY 18, 1966

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND ASTRONAUTICS,
Washington, D.C.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:30 a.m. in room 2318, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. George P. Miller (chairman of the committee) presiding.

The CHAIRMAN. The committee will be in order.

Let the record show that there is a quorum present.

Before we get into the hearing, I want to welcome all of you back and to serve notice upon you that it looks as though this is going to be a very busy year. I have no idea what the budget is going to look like but I want to say with respect to the NASA authorization bill, that I am going to see Mr. Webb today and I am going to urge him to have the backup books up here just as rapidly as they can so we can get busy on them.

I want to see if we cannot get the NASA authorization bill out of the way in a timely manner in order that we can move in on some of our other activities.

This year we shall try to do a large part of the work in the full committee which has heretofore been done by the subcommittees. This does not mean we are downgrading the subcommittees in any way, but there are many areas which you are now more familiar with, which have previously been considered by subcommittees and which will not require the same amount of research as in the past. So, I think by disposing of those items in the full committee, the subcommittees can devote more time and more intensive effort to those items which appear in the request which are new or those recurring items which need special attention.

We shall try to conclude our consideration of the NASA budget as soon as possible, to clear the way for other activities.

Several members of the committee and staff traveled during the interim, and the reports they have made have been highly satisfactory. I want to thank them for taking the time to do this. I hope you have all had a good rest so that you can come back full of vigor and with a desire to work hard.

I wish to announce the meeting of the committee's Panel on Science and Technology which will take place on the 25th, 26th, and 27th of January. You have had notices of this. I remind you that the guest panelist this year will be Lord Snow, an outstanding English scientist and writer. It is a compliment to this committee and a compliment to the work we are doing that he should come over from England to attend this panel meeting, and we are very happy to have him here.

Dean Price of Harvard will be the moderator, and I am assured that we can look forward to a very interesting and instructive meeting.

You may be interested to know, the report of our last panel has become a "best seller" at the Government Printing Office. They are being used in universities and the Italian Government asked official permission to have it translated into Italian. So, I think within the scientific community this has resounded to our credit. I am certain, under Dean Price, with Lord Snow as one of the guest panelists, we will have another very informative session.

I am also pleased to announce that the Vice President will be here to open the panel meeting on Tuesday morning.

CONSIDERATION OF S. 774, THE METRIC STUDY BILL

The CHAIRMAN. Now, getting on with our business, the first item on the agenda this morning is the consideration of S. 774, the metric study bill. In the first session the committee favorably reported a similar bill, H.R. 10329, but the Rules Committee deferred action on our request for a rule. Meantime, the Senate Commerce Committee completed hearings on the Senate bill and reported it with amendments. The Senate passed the bill, which has been messaged to the House and referred to this committee.

Originally both these bills were the same, but the Senate bill, S. 774, as finally reported and passed by the Senate, contains several minor differences. You have before you a concise statement of these differences.

The primary variation between the two bills is the amount of authorization of funds to be appropriated for the conduct of the study. In the House the bill would authorize a sum not to exceed \$2.5 million. The Senate authorizes such sums as are necessary, but restricts the appropriation to not more than \$500,000 for the first year.

There are some minor differences in language. The Senate has adopted a pro forma amendment to provide for the title to more nearly describe the purposes of the bill. It also contains broader language and authorizes the Secretary of Commerce to consult with representatives of U.S. industry, science, engineering, and labor, and their associations, in carrying out the purposes of the act.

There does appear to be an ambiguity in the authorization language, and at the proper time I propose to offer an amendment to make more definite the intention of the original legislation. The amendment was drafted by our counsel and has been discussed with the Senate Commerce Committee and found acceptable to make clear the amount of the authorization.

I have asked Dr. J. Herbert Hollomon, Assistant Secretary of Commerce, to come here this morning to present the Department's views on S. 774 in view of the fact that the Senate Commerce Committee amended the bill in committee after the hearings were closed.

Dr. Hollomon, we would like to hear your views now.

STATEMENT OF DR. J. HERBERT HOLLOMON, ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, ACCOMPANIED BY GORDON CHRISTENSON, ASSISTANT GENERAL COUNSEL

Dr. HOLLOMON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I have with me Mr. Gordon Christenson, Assistant General Counsel of the Department of Commerce.

It is a pleasure to be back before this committee after the holiday, and I am pleased to submit a brief statement which I would like to read, Mr. Chairman.

You have requested the views of the Department of Commerce concerning S. 774, a bill passed by the Senate September 20, 1965, that would authorize the Secretary of Commerce to make a study to determine the advantages and disadvantages of increased use of the metric system in the United States. As you know, the Department has consistently supported legislation authorizing such a study. Our views concerning the pressing need for comprehensive and reliable information on this subject to provide a basis for well-founded courses of action for the country were presented to your committee in considerable detail during the hearing held August 2, 1965. In most respects, S. 774 is identical to H.R. 10329, a bill for the same purpose that was reported favorably by your committee following that hearing. Accordingly, my comments at present will deal only with those sections in which the language of S. 774 differs substantially from that of H.R. 10329.

Section 2(5) of S. 774 would require the Secretary of Commerce to—

permit appropriate participation by representatives of United States industry, science, engineering, and labor, and their associations, in the planning and conduct of the program authorized by the first section of this Act, and in the evaluation of the information secured under such program.

This language is somewhat more specific in its provision for the participation of non-Government interests in all phases of the proposed study than the comparable section of H.R. 10329. We have no objection to the more specific language since it would not alter our plan for the conduct of the study and may, in fact, serve to impress upon industry and other special interest groups the great importance of their wholehearted cooperation in this national undertaking.

As indicated in my testimony on August 2, 1965, we believe that the active participation of industry, labor, and other interests is not only desirable, but is essential to the success of the proposed study. We would expect to solicit the advice and assistance of informed representative groups in all phases of the study including the planning, data collection and analysis, and evaluation of study results.

It would be understood, of course, that the overall responsibility for the conduct of the study and for the ultimate recommendations to the Congress would reside with the Secretary of Commerce. Section 3 of both bills clearly provides that the Secretary shall submit a complete report of findings "together with such recommendations as he considers to be appropriate and in the best interests of the United States." It is our interpretation that these recommendations would be formulated by the Secretary, giving due consideration to varying points of view that may be revealed by the study.

The only other significant difference between S. 774 and H.R. 10329 is with regard to the funding of the study. Section 4 of S. 774 authorizes such appropriations as may be necessary to carry out the act, with no more than \$500,000 for the first year. H.R. 10329, on the other hand, would authorize appropriations not to exceed \$2,500,000 for the complete study.

As noted in my earlier testimony, and explained by the Director of the National Bureau of Standards during his appearance before your committee on August 5, 1965, it is not possible at present for us to make a fully reliable estimate of the total cost of the proposed study. Because of the exceptional scope and complexity of the subject, and the lack of comparable prior experience to serve as a guide, several months of study of the sort contemplated under the planning phase will be needed before a reliable estimate of the total cost can be developed. Thus, while there is good reason to believe that \$2,500,000 should be adequate, we really will not know this to be the case until the planning phase of the study is completed.

It is possible, however, to predict the cost of this planning phase with reasonable accuracy. We estimate that it can be completed in 1 year at a cost of about \$500,000. S. 774 would provide adequately for the planning phase, and would leave the level of funding for the remainder of the study open for consideration and justification on the basis of these initial findings. In view of the many uncertainties involved in the proposed study, we believe that this arrangement offers important advantages.

We feel, however, that section 4 of S. 774 concerning authorization for appropriations should clearly reflect this flexible position.

I would like to say parenthetically, Mr. Chairman, that we believe that the appropriation for the planning phase should be able to be carried forward for the full 3 years of the study. So, if the first year's appropriation is not used during that year, it can be used for the study in the next 2 years.

In summary, we believe that enactment of S. 774 with some minor language clarification would provide an adequate and appropriate authorization for the conduct of this vitally important study. We urge this committee to act promptly and favorably on this measure.

The CHAIRMAN. Gentlemen, you have heard the statement by Secretary Hollomon. Are there any questions?

Mr. PELLY. Mr. Chairman, I understood the witness to indicate this was a 3-year program, but I do not think the bill reads that way now; does it?

Dr. HOLLOMON. There is an ambiguity with respect to that. All the testimony has indicated a 3-year program. I think it would be appropriate to clarify the language of the authorization section of the bill.

Mr. PELLY. In other words, you are recommending a program to be authorized for not exceeding 3 years?

Dr. HOLLOMON. Yes, sir; that is correct. I think the Congress should put some time limit as to how long it should take to carry forward this study so you can expect a report at a reasonable and appropriate time. Therefore, I would put a limit of a 3-year study.

The only question is whether the language of the bill should authorize appropriations for the succeeding 2 years.

The CHAIRMAN. Section 3 of the bill reads:

The Secretary shall submit to the Congress such interim reports as he deems desirable, and within three years after the date of the enactment of this Act, a full and complete report of the findings under the program authorized by this Act, together with such recommendations as he considers to be appropriate and in the best interests of the United States.

So, you have a limitation in there.

Mr. PELLY. In other words, that language puts a limitation on the study, by the Department, of 3 years.

Dr. HOLLOMON. That is correct. The next section of the Senate bill, however, is somewhat ambiguous with respect to the appropriation. That is the point I was trying to make.

Mr. ALBERT. Is it not a question of the appropriated funds carrying through for 3 years rather than the study carrying through for 3 years?

Dr. HOLLOMON. That is correct. That is the suggestion that I made, that the appropriated funds be able to be carried through for the 3-year period.

The CHAIRMAN. May I say to Mr. Pelly further, section 5 reads, "This act shall expire 30 days after submission of the final report pursuant to section 3."

Mr. PELLY. Mr. Chairman, the only other question I have is as to the matter of open end authorization. I think we might run into some difficulty in the House. I certainly would prefer to have an overall limit on the authorized amount of the program.

The CHAIRMAN. The amendment I spoke of will be to strike out all of section 4 and insert in lieu thereof new language:

There are authorized to be appropriated such sums as are necessary to carry out the purposes of this Act, provided that not to exceed \$500,000 shall be appropriated for the first year of the program authorized by this Act.

The total as we reported earlier will be in the report, but this legislative history will determine that.

Mr. Wydler.

Mr. WYDLER. I just wanted to ask, is this \$500,000 we are talking about in the President's budget?

Dr. HOLLOMON. Not that I know of.

Mr. RUMSFELD. It is not clear to me what the amendment you are going to offer says. Does it leave it an open-end authorization so it will be \$500,000 for the first year, but that money will be available throughout the life of the authorization and then the remainder of the fund is completely left open? The \$500,000 which they should not exceed during the first year will be there until used?

The CHAIRMAN. That is correct.

Mr. RUMSFELD. The total amount will not be put in?

The CHAIRMAN. It will not be put in the bill.

Mr. RUMSFELD. They will not have to come back to this committee. They will go to the Appropriations Committee.

The CHAIRMAN. It will be an open authorization.

Mr. RUMSFELD. Apparently when the bill was first considered there was no objection to the \$2.5 million. Apparently that was another way it could be worked.

The CHAIRMAN. Our bill and original Senate bill had the limitation. The Senate committee amended their bill and the Senate passed the

bill as amended. The fact remains that the best estimate today is that this will cost about \$2.5 million over a period of 3 years.

Mr. MOSHER. Mr. Chairman, I understood Dr. Hollomon to say it is impossible to know at this time.

The CHAIRMAN. That is correct.

Mr. MOSHER. The implication was that he thinks it might cost more than \$2.5 million.

Dr. HOLLOMON. Let me try to make our position clear. We would be perfectly willing to accept the language of the original House bill with the limitation of \$2.5 million. We would also be willing to accept the sense of the Senate bill which limits it to \$500,000 the first year. Our position is that the estimate of \$2.5 million at the present time is a reasonable upper limit estimate. However, there are uncertainties. These uncertainties are reasonably great because of the size and magnitude of the study that is involved.

Really, what we are saying is that it is up to the committee. We are willing to accept essentially either language.

Mr. MOSHER. Dr. Hollomon, if you found \$2.5 million was not enough, you would be willing to come back to this committee?

Dr. HOLLOMON. Yes, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. They would have to because the legislative report would tie them down to \$2.5 million.

Dr. HOLLOMON. That is right. Our position is that we would accept and be satisfied with either approach to the object. The Senate wanted to make it pretty clear how much would be spent the first year. The second and third years are not too clear. On the other hand, the House in the original bill wanted to limit the size of the program. Either approach to the problem is perfectly acceptable.

Mr. MOSHER. Mr. Chairman, are you saying in effect the report will be written so as to tie down this figure?

The CHAIRMAN. It will be a guide to the Appropriations Committee, as any report is a guide, and it will be a guide to the administering agency.

Mr. MOSHER. But it would be in such form that the Department would have an obligation to come back to this committee for a further authorization if they asked for an appropriation beyond that figure.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, if they asked for an appropriation beyond that, they would have to come back.

Mr. RUMSFELD. Mr. Chairman, I personally would prefer to see the \$2.5 million in the bill in view of the fact that the Department has no objection whatsoever to that. It seems to me it would avoid problems on the floor when the bill goes to the floor with many people suggesting here we start out the year with legislation which leaves an open end authorization. I would hope that the chairman would agree to what the Department has agreed to, putting back in a top limit figure.

The CHAIRMAN. I would like to say to my friend from Illinois that I would be very happy to do that, because I feel exactly the same way he does, but as a matter of practical approach to the problem, the Senate took this out and we have to be in accord to get a public law.

We are trying to clarify and adopt the Senate bill so we can get a study underway. I am willing to adopt this procedure as a practical matter in order to get the bill passed.

Dr. HOLLOMON. Mr. Chairman, perhaps I can be of some help in this matter. I think it appropriate to go on record that if there is any

significant increase over the \$2.5 million estimated, I think it would be appropriate for the Department to come back to this committee on the basis of the legislative history. I think it would be appropriate in any event if any significant deviation from that estimate were contemplated.

So, I would be willing and I think it important to go on record that that would be the case.

Mr. MOSHER. In addition to what Dr. Hollomon said, I believe you indicated a moment ago that you felt perhaps you had an obligation to do that.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes. That ties it down. This is all a part of the legislative history.

Mr. HECHLER. Since you appeared before the committee last August, have any nations either adopted or abandoned the metric system?

Dr. HOLLOMON. Not to my knowledge. There has been no new step until very recently, last week, in London and in Paris. The British are formulating much more closely their plans as to how they will gradually make the conversion from the conventional system to the metric system.

Mr. HECHLER. The date and timing?

Dr. HOLLOMON. The date and timing is over the next 10-year period.

The CHAIRMAN. I may say that during the interim since we were last here, there has been an indication the Australian Government has changed its currency and has gone to a decimal currency, which is a step in this direction.

Mr. WYDLER. Doctor, is there anything in this bill which requires this study to get underway in this next fiscal year?

Dr. HOLLOMON. I would presume, if I understand your question, that immediately upon the passage of the bill it would then be the responsibility of the administration to seek appropriations and immediately to begin to undertake the study.

Mr. WYDLER. But would it be possible to defer action on the bill? If you did not get an appropriation from the Appropriations Committee, could it be put over to a later year?

Dr. HOLLOMON. If we did not get the appropriation, we would have no alternative but to do so. It is our recommendation and our position that this study get underway as promptly as it possibly can.

Mr. WYDLER. Is there some specific reason that 1966 would be a more appropriate year than 1967?

Dr. HOLLOMON. My own view of the matter is that this is a subject of such importance that, to lay the facts and analysis on the table for the consideration of the Congress, the study is overdue. I know this committee has been struggling with this problem for some years. It is my view that the study is overdue and that we need the facts as promptly as we can lay them before the public.

Mr. WYDLER. I am just raising the question because we are all well aware here as Members of the Congress, and I am sure you are equally well aware, that we are facing a very tight budgetary situation in our Federal Government this year caused by our involvement in the war in Vietnam. I think all of us will be trying to seek ways of deferring to the extent possible and practical all expenditures that can be put off without any great harm to our economy and our Nation.

I believe we shall have to set priorities in the various programs to accomplish this.

I have been trying to direct my own thinking to the necessity of starting this program in the year 1966 rather than next year or possibly a year after that.

Dr. HOLLOMON. I would simply like to reemphasize that in my view the fact that with the various nations of the world and much of our economy concerned with the measurement system which we use in the design of products and in the manufacturing process, with the increasing growth of the European market and with the increasing number of countries that either are contemplating or have converted to the metric system, I think it extremely important that this study, which is really quite modest from the standpoint of its cost, should get underway as promptly as possible.

I recognize, as you pointed out, that in all cases we have to consider the potential cost and benefits against all the other requests for funds. My own personal feeling is that it would be costly to this country not to have before it the facts of the matter and how we should proceed.

Mr. WYDLER. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Vivian.

Mr. VIVIAN. Mr. Chairman, I should like to comment on the cost of the study. I would like to point out that the cost is less than 1 cent per American taxpayer over the years. Every time a pharmacist changes from ounces to grams to make out a prescription, he probably spends far more than that in terms of salary time. So, I am sure the loss per year to the economy from not going ahead with the change is much greater than the cost, not only this year but in coming years, of the study. To continue the loss I think would be an economic mistake, not an advantage.

I suggest to those who consider this an unwarranted expenditure, it is also an unwarranted waste not to go ahead.

Mr. TEAGUE. Mr. Chairman, I move the adoption of the amendment.

The CHAIRMAN. Without objection, the amendment is adopted.

Mr. TEAGUE. Mr. Chairman, I move the bill be reported as amended.

The CHAIRMAN. All those in favor, signify by saying "aye"; contrary minded. The "ayes" have it, and the bill is unanimously reported out.

That carries with it the direction that the chairman shall take all necessary legislative acts and procedures to bring the bill to the floor.

