The AFIPS Washington Office

Recently, a member wrote to me questioning the need for the AFIPS Washington Office (announced in the June 1975 issue of Computer). The letter expressed doubt as to the benefits of such an office to our members and questioned whether we should be spending our money for such an activity. It occurred to me that others may have similar questions, so I would like to elaborate on this subject in more detail.

As I said in the December 1974 issue of Computer, few computer professionals would dispute the importance of providing accurate and timely information on computers to the federal government. Many of us gain our livelihood from federally-sponsored R&D programs on information processing, and all of us are or will be affected by government regulations on information processing.

And yet, until now there has been practically nobody in Washington with the authority or the qualifications to speak for the professional societies in the information processing field—even though the federal government itself recognizes the need for such an informed voice. It was in response to this pressing need that the AFIPS Board of Directors overwhelmingly approved the establishment of an AFIPS Washington Office at its meeting last November 8.

The functions of the new AFIPS Washington Office will include the monitoring of government announcements and publications, in order to provide an ongoing information service to AFIPS constituents. During the first year, it will establish a limited and informal contact with members of executive agencies and congressional staffs, and will assist such groups in acquiring the consultation or testimony of qualified information processing experts. This effort will be expanded during the second year to include more extensive personal liaison, informal meetings, and information exchange with these governmental groups.

A major concern in all this activity will be to avoid any lobbying—which is prohibited by AFIPS' constitution.

Financing Like all AFIPS projects and activities, the Washington Office is financed directly by AFIPS—which means it is financed indirectly and partially by the AFIPS constituent societies, just as a shareholder may be said to "finance" the activities of a corporation. However, the dues that AFIPS collects from its 15 constituent societies constitute less than 5% of its total revenue. (Our own annual dues contribution, which matches that of ACM and DPMA, is $3000.) By far the largest source of revenue for AFIPS comes from the distribution of the surplus of the annual National Computer Conference. When AFIPS' reserves become excessive, the AFIPS Board of Directors may vote (as in fact it has done from time to time) to distribute a certain amount of its reserves to its constituent societies—the amount being proportional to the accumulated membership dues of the individual society. Clearly, then, the Computer Society, like all other AFIPS constituent societies, contributes to the financing of all AFIPS activities.

However, the purpose of forming AFIPS is to create a formal mechanism through which its constituent societies can jointly pursue activities which are vital to their memberships and to the information processing community, and yet which could not be effectively covered or financed by any single constituent society. The annual NCC and many of the professional and international activities conducted by AFIPS are good examples. Certainly, liaison between government and the entire information processing profession is one function which AFIPS is able to pursue better than any other entity.
It should be pointed out that the Computer Society stands to enjoy a unique position: we will benefit from the AFIPS Washington Office representation in the exchange of accurate and timely information between the government and the information processing profession, and from the IEEE Washington Office, which also represents us in the field of electrical and electronics engineering as well as in those areas involving the economic well being of the engineering profession, such as pension legislation, etc.

Possible IEEE Membership Dues Increase

The IEEE Board of Directors is seriously considering an increase of $5 in IEEE membership dues, plus a $5 regional assessment for professional activities (the latter would apply only to members residing in the US and Canada). It is argued that the increases, which would become effective in 1976, are necessary in order to maintain the same level of services the IEEE now provides. Although the IEEE Board rejected such a dues increase at its last meeting in early April, primarily because of its poor presentation, the proposal will be considered again at the coming IEEE Board meeting in September. In the meantime, responding to the limited information available to us at the last IEEE Technical Activities Board meeting, the representatives of all the IEEE groups/societies overwhelmingly recommended rejection of the proposal. I was told that the general reaction from IEEE regional activities and section officers was also negative. Obviously nobody wants to increase membership dues without sufficient justification.

Nevertheless, because of the high inflation rate we all suffer from, we have to realize that it is only a matter of time—if not in 1976 then in 1977—before IEEE membership dues must increase if we expect to maintain the current level of membership services.

The IEEE Executive Director and General Manager, Herbert Schulke, who took this position last year, has tried very hard to improve the effectiveness of every aspect of IEEE Headquarters staff support, and has in fact enlisted the Computer Society among others to contribute their expertise toward this end. In response to his request in one important cost area, I have established a committee to review the Headquarters computer services operation and help improve its cost effectiveness. This committee consists of Rolly Arndt, Sam Levine, and Dick Simmons as its chairman, and I expect their recommendations to be complete by the middle of August. Although much improvement needs to be done, efforts like these are certainly a good start.

If you wish to be heard on this matter, you should correspond as soon as possible to our IEEE Division V Director, A. S. Hoagland, IBM, P. O. Box 1900, Boulder, Colorado 80302.

Computer Society Membership Dues and Subscription Fees

Regardless of whether the IEEE membership dues increase next year or not, our own 1976 membership dues will remain at $6. However, our Governing Board has approved the following two changes in the subscription fees for optional publications: one is to increase the subscription fee for the monthly Transactions on Computers from $4 to $6, and the other is to eliminate the reduction of $2 for the first optional publication subscription fee. These changes will only partially cover the large increases we have experienced in the printing and distribution costs of all of our publications. For example, the approximate cost per subscriber for Transactions on Computers has increased from $10 in 1973 to $12 in 1974 to $14 in 1975. The differences between actual costs vs. subscription fees for all of our publications, as well as a description of our other sources of revenue, will be presented in a financial report in the next issue of Computer.

Finally, it should be observed that the proposed IEEE membership dues increase is not for the purpose of increasing IEEE support to groups/societies finances. But because such IEEE support has not been a major source of our revenue in recent years, its effect on our finances would be negligible in any case. All this will be apparent in our financial report.

Stephen S. Yau
President
IEEE Computer Society