The U.S. Privacy Protection Study Commission held an October 13-15 workshop on state privacy and fair information practices acts in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Robert Ross has been appointed general counsel of the White House Office of Telecommunication Policy.

According to the trade press, AT&T and CBEMA have held discussions on a possible interconnection standard for data communications equipment.

AFIPS in Washington

AFIPS organizes FCC planning conference. Plans have now been finalized for AFIPS to provide a planning conference on computer communications to the Federal Communications Commission. (For details, see p. 105.)

AFIPS attends science court colloquium. In September the director of the AFIPS Washington Office attended a colloquium on the proposed "science court" sponsored by the Department of Commerce, National Science Foundation, and American Association for the Advancement of Science. The science court has been proposed by Dr. Arthur Kantrowitz, a member of the Presidential Advisory Group on Anticipated Advances in Science and Technology, as a means of adjudicating scientific disputes which are part of major public policy decisions. The proposed court would deal only with scientific issues, leaving policy matters for the normal decision-making groups within the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the federal government. While utilizing an adversary hearing, the science court would attempt to deliver definitive, credible rulings on scientific issues, or at least to identify the current state of scientific knowledge.

The colloquium heard divergent views on the merits of proceeding with an experimental science court, and while there was by no means a consensus, the prevailing opinion appeared to be supportive of going forward with such an experiment. In particular, the colloquium heard favorable views from both Presidential Science Advisor Guyford Stever and Secretary of Commerce Elliot Richardson.

Update Section continued on p. 103

Letters to the Editor

Open letter to members

In May 1976 we appealed to the computer community with an open letter, "Toward Democratization of the IEEE Computer Society." Of the total 64 answers received, 62 approve the idea of democratization. A new shortened version of an open letter follows.

In the IEEE Computer Society, exceeding 20,000 members, greater emphasis must be placed on the adequate functioning of the administration and its ability to consider the interests of the majority of the membership. This can be achieved only if the society is reorganized as a democracy. This includes: (a) general multicandidate election of the administration, (b) presence of an independent organ which maintains just and impartial resolution of conflicts, (c) freedom of written expression.

Unfortunately we must submit that the current structure of the society totally ignores the basic ingredients of the democratic scientific community.

I. The society does not provide for general multicandidate election of the leadership. (a) All members are deprived of electing their president and vice-presidents. This privilege is extended only to 20 members of the Governor's Board. Furthermore, these highest elected officers must necessarily belong to the board and even the petition candidates nominated by members must be governors (Bylaws, Art. II, Sec. 4, 5 Computer, July 1975). (b) All members practically are deprived of electing the Governing Board. The board nominations are made by the nominating committee appointed by the administration (Art. VI, Sec. 15) and the board itself elects new governors (Art II, Sec. 2). True, members are given the rights to nominate petition candidates to the governors. This triggers the general election (Art. II, Sec. 1, 2). However, election of one or two petition governors hardly changes board policy, because a majority of governors would still be elected by the administration. Also, this pro-administration majority can always expel a dissenting colleague using Art. V, Sec. 7.

Thus, nondemocratic nominations, absence of critical discussion in print of the merits of candidates, nomination of only one candidate for one elective office, complete exclusion of the members from participation in elections may lead to a situation in which the administration would feel free of any responsibility for their actions and become bureaucratically neglectful of the interests of the majority.

II. The society is without an independent appeals committee to act as a mediator of a possible scientific conflict between a member and the administration. We have a sufficient number of documents which support the contention that a complaint from a society member on inept functioning of an associate editor, etc., is either destined to perish in a bureaucratic correspondence with the society officers or these officers tend to ignore such complaints entirely, failing to answer the letters. The existing immunity of editors prompts their usual automatic acquiescence to a reviewer's conclusions, however unsubstantiated or untrue. The authors of rejected papers must be given a democratic right to appeal to an independent organ whenever they are able to refute the erroneousness of the reviewer's contentions. Granted, the appeals committee should not repeatedly review all rejected papers. However, the cases of flagrant violations can be easily detected. Therefore, the appeals committee can maintain an important scientific principle of equal treatment for all authors independent of their official positions.
III. In view of the geographical separation of members, the importance played by Computer can hardly be overestimated. A current administration and representatives of each zone are given the right to nominate one candidate for each elective office. Also 50 members can nominate one petition candidate for each office. Zone candidates are nominated at the joint zone meeting attended by the area representatives. The month before the election, Computer should include a self-addressed ballot with the candidates names.

These proposals do not require either fundamental changes in the existing framework of the Society or additional financial expenses. The essence of the project is to have general democratic and representative elections so that the leadership can provide equal treatment and justice and also to strengthen the role of the area committees.

Here we give only a brief presentation of the proposals. Complete text will be sent on request to the members of the Committee of Concerned Computer Specialists (CCCS), 1210 Carlos Drive, Lincoln, Nebraska 68505.

Our final comment: Many of our respondents cautioned that the administration might assume a detached position such as that of the French monarch Louis XVI who used to say: “Lived so for 25 years. Will continue till doomsday.” To establish whether or not the leadership follows the tragic view of this guillotined king whose doomsday was hastened by an angry population, the respondents proposed the following test of the leadership’s attitude toward democratization:

1. The society’s president, Prof. Simmons, must appoint a referendum committee not later than December 31, 1976. This Committee must include at least one representative from the CCCS.
2. The Referendum Committee must prepare the key questions for the national referendum to be discussed in the April 1977 issue of Computer.
3. Conduct the national referendum in October 1977.

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1976 IEEE COMPUTER SOCIETY ROSTER

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The next meeting of the Governing Board will be at 9 a.m., Friday, March 4, at the Jack Tar Hotel, San Francisco.

November 1976

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