

Article from:

The Actuary

March 1981 – Volume 15, No. 3

he Actuary

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Published monthly (except July and August) by the SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES, 208 S. LaSalle St., Chicago, Illinois, 60604, Robin B. Leckie, President, Kenneth T. Clark, Secretary, Robert I. Johansen, Treasurer, Robert E. Hunstad, Director of Publications. Non-member subscriptions: students, \$4.50; others, \$5.50.

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EDITORIAL

THE POST OF U.S. GOVERNMENT ACTUARY

RANKLIN B. DANA'S query (at the close of his article in this issue) prompted us to turn to several members who were active in Society affairs in the 1950's. We asked them what they recall of past efforts to promote the idea of having a Government Actuary in Washington, and how they see today's prospects. In this space we pass along the views of two of these men, Henry F. Rood and Charles A. Siegfried.

Henry Rood was deeply involved in the groundwork leading to the Academy's formation in 1965, and was its first President. He suspects that the idea arose from observing government actuaries in Great Britain, particularly Sir George H. Maddex whom the Society had elected an honorary Fellow in 1950. Looking at today, Mr. Rood considers that in view of the many actuarial areas in the U.S. Government a good case can be made for a top actuary having wide jurisdiction. He sees this as giving deserved recognition to the importance of actuarial work and to citizen's vital concern that the various governmental plans be soundly based. And this would, he thinks, assist in achieving the official recognition that our profession seeks.

Charles Siegfried agrees that it would be helpful to the profession if there were one or more high-ranking actuarial positions in the Federal government, and public interest would be well served if these were to be established and responsibility filled. But he sees formidable political and professional obstacles in the way of this being accomplished.

Like others among our correspondents he regards the political problems today as similar in part to those that proved baffling when a Federal Charter was being sought for the Academy in the early 1960's. He perceives also a problem springing from rivalries among government agencies that need actuarial expertise.

But the professional difficulties seem to Mr. Siegfried even more formidable than those in the political arena. He has long believed that a necessary condition for earning a leading actuarial role in government is that our profession have a stronger background than now exists, in the way of texts, critical studies and research that serve to establish acceptable actuarial principles and procedures. He has found inadequate internal support for such measures, and recognizes that accomplishing them would demand a major money-raising effort.

Readers will note that Mr. Dana is urging us to make our views known-and how better than through this newsletter?—on the desirability and feasibility of embarking upon a serious fresh effort to get this large question considered. Our several correspondents fully share this hope; some of them specially mentioned that they would like to hear from two stalwarts whose knowledge and views command great respect—Messrs. Reinhard A. Hohaus and Robert J. Myers. E.J.M.

LETTERS

Releasing Exam Results

It's about time—in fact long overdue that the Society finds a better approach to communicating exam results to our students.

The main problem is the time lag between availability of results in Chicago and a few other U.S. cities compared with Montreal or Ouebec, for example, Anxious students work at about 10% productivity until they know whether they passed or failed.

As one possible solution, I suggest making the results available at the same date and same hour in every examination center; that all students for each exam be told in advance what this date and hour will be; and that the period between release of the first and last results be kept as short as possible.

I do not see why some students have to go through this excruciating period of anxiety when it can be eliminated. Let them cope with the joy of passing or the frustration of failing; but let us remove the "pre-result" uncertainty as much as we can.

Louis-Jacques Pelletier

Director of Education, Linden Cole replies: This year we will introduce a new scheme to see if it will solve the problem described so well by Mr. Pelletier. We will appropriate one of the Society office's phone numbers strictly to answer inquiries about exam results. The estimated dates when results may be obtained will have been announced to students. Callers will be told whether those whose candidate numbers they give have passed or failed; thus one call can get pass-fail results for a group of students.

This past year we have been successful in mailing results several days earlier than students were told to expect them. But, especially for Canadians, declines and fluctuations in speed of postal delivery sometimes nullified our efforts.

Iteration

Z. I. Mosesson's story (Jan. issue) brings to mind that I passed Part 7 three times. I had difficulty explaining to my mother that I was making progress.

Colin E. Jack

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