MARINE POLICY

The deep six for NOAA

A noticeable atmosphere of gloom has descended around proponents of a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency (NOAA) within the Federal Government.

The proposal to establish such an agency, encompassing some but by no means all of the nation's marine science activities, is now more than 14 months old (SN: 1/18/69, p. 62). Legislation to create NOAA has been introduced in both the House and the Senate. Hearings have been held, last year by the Subcommittee on Oceanography of the House Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries (SN: 10/11, p. 325) and this year by the newly created Subcommittee on Oceanography of the Senate Committee on Commerce. A great deal of favorable testimony from industry and academic boosters of ocean activity has been heard.

But the response of the Nixon Administration has been markedly unenthusiastic.

There seems little reason to dispute the pessimism of Dr. William M. Chapman, a NOAA supporter who is currently a member of more than a score of advisory groups in marine affairs and who has testified on marine resource needs before Congressional groups for more than 20 years. "I have quite lost hope," he told the Senate subcommittee last month, "that H. R. 13247 or S. 2841 (the NOAA bill) is going to be enacted by the Congress."

The problems of NOAA go beyond the normal territorial-protective impulses of Federal agencies resisting creation of any new agency out of the ongoing programs of existing ones. NOAA has fallen victim to the larger issue of the organization of the entire Executive Branch of the Government, when most substantive attention is going toward attacking problems of the environment and natural resources of all kinds, not just oceanic.

In recent Senate testimony one agency head after another concluded by urging that no formal action on NOAA legislation be taken until the President has considered the recommendations of the year-long study of his Council on Executive Organization, headed by Roy L. Ash of Litton Industries. The council is to report to the President by April 15.

Last week on the floor of the Senate, the chairman of the oceanography subcommittee, Sen. Ernest F. Hollings (D-S.C.), charged that the White House staff has been attempting to scuttle the NOAA concept in favor of a counter proposal placing a part of the oceans program under the Department of the Interior. The Ash Council, he said, long ago made up its mind on oceanic reorganization.

Under the Administration plan, the Department of the Interior will be reshuffled, says Hollings. The Environmental Science Services Administration will be brought in from the Commerce Department, the National Sea Grant Program from the National Science Foundation, the U. S. Lake Survey from the Corps of Engineers and the National Oceanographic Data Center and the National Oceanographic Instrumentation Center from the Department of Defense. There they would be joined with Interior's Bureau of Commercial Fisheries and with the marine programs of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife. The Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife, Parks and Marine Resources would be retitled the Assistant Secretary for Oceanography and Meteorology.

Although White House aides do not explicitly confirm the Hollings version, they indicate that the Ash Council's thinking has definitely been in the direction of incorporating ocean activities within Interior rather than within a new agency. And the version fits with a number of other signs in recent months that the Administration is leaning toward a reorganized Interior Department as a base for its main activities in environment, natural resources and oceanography.

The agencies and activities that would be incorporated within the Interior Department in the Administration plan correspond closely with those that would compose NOAA, except that the Coast Guard is left in the Department of Transportation.

But the fact that they would be under the wing of an existing department, already large and complex in organization and with a traditional emphasis on a spectrum of internal affairs not relating primarily to the ocean, is not agreeable to most NOAA proponents. They have hoped for the status, prestige and budgetary muscle of an independent agency. Some feel any move toward consolidation would be an improvement, but in Sen. Hollings' view, incorporation within Interior would torpedo the whole ocean program.

"The oceans," he says, "are too important for the United States to afford anything but the highest level of attention."

Despite the Senator's plea, the signs are not hopeful for NOAA. "From the perspective of a scientist who happens to be an oceanographer, having an agency of his own seems like a good idea," says a staff member of the Ash Council. "But from the point of view of the President, the management of the programs might be better incorporated in an existing structure."

AMBULATORY UNITS

Revamping health care

Ever since the early years of the Johnson Administration, emphasis in Federal biomedical programs has been shifting from research to perfecting the delivery of health care. It is a direction in which the Nixon Administration is continuing (SN: 1/3, p. 7), but with an individual twist: The long-standing tendency to see the need for health care in terms of new hospital construction, which seems never to catch up to the need, is being replaced by an emphasis on ambulatory care, in an effort to take some of the pressure off the nation's hard-pressed hospitals.

Increased funding for the construction of community hospitals was among the reasons President Nixon opposed the controversial appropriations bill for the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (SN: 2/21, p. 196). He emphasized instead the need for ambulatory-care facilities.

A trimmed-down version of the bill signed this week by the President reduces funds for new hospital construction, in accord with Mr. Nixon's wish. The new bill also carries a provision that allows the President to withhold 2 percent of funds, provided he does not cut any one program more than 25 percent; it leaves research funds at the reduced level established earlier.

The philosophy behind the system of ambulatory care for hospital patients grows out of the realization that all sick people are not equally sick. They need three types of care: primary, secondary and tertiary. The idea seems elemental, but in practice it could create a health care revolution.

Primary care would be that care a patient receives before entering the hospital, and would be provided by outpatient clinics, emergency rooms and neighborhood health centers. Preventive health care would be delivered. Secondary care would be that provided by hospitalization, and tertiary care, if needed, would include recuperative facilities, sanitariums and the like.

Ambulatory care, which is literally that care a patient can receive while still on his feet, encompasses both primary and tertiary care. Accordingly, the patient would first visit an out-patient clinic, emergency room, or center where he would be diagnosed and treated by a physician. At this point, he may either be discharged by the

physician or sent further on into the health system for hospitalization or secondary care. If tertiary care is needed, it would be provided by ambulatory-care facilities.

Exact definitions of facilities needed to make ambulatory care a part of the hospital system are still a subject for research. And most of the study so far is under the aegis of the Hill-Burton Program and the National Center of Health Services, Research and Development.

The Hill-Burton Program provides grants for construction and modernization of traditional health facilities, but under the new impetus it is channeling some support to the development of ambulatory care facilities, while seeking additional funds to do more.

The National Center started operating in May of 1968 to support research, development and related training in institutions involved in health services.

The center's budget under the just-signed appropriations bill for 1970 is approximately $44.9 million, of which $40 million is for grants and contracts. For fiscal year 1971, the Administration is seeking an increase to $57.4 million.

Current grants are going to Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston and the Johns Hopkins Medical School in Baltimore. At Peter Bent, researchers are exploring an automating system for ambulatory clinics in hospitals; Johns Hopkins is trying to design the building best suited to efficient out-patient care. The question is whether to use a regular clinic-style structure or something comparable to a doctor's office or suite.

A barrier to the broader implementation of ambulatory-care programs is that most health insurance plans fail to recognize and cover them.

But a trail is being marked by the Chicago Blue Cross, which has made special provision to cover such health care.

PANALBA LOSES AGAIN

A free hand for FDA

The U.S. Supreme Court this week freed the Food and Drug Administration to act summarily against Panalba and 85 other controversial combination antibiotics. The high court refused to restrain FDA, as requested, while the Upjohn Co. and the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association prepared their appeal of an Ohio circuit court decision (SN: 3/7, p. 242). The Ohio court had ruled that FDA was within its rights in applying drug control legislation enacted in 1962 to drugs that were marketed before that time. The Ohio court also said FDA did not have to grant the manufacturer a hearing before banning a drug from the market.

ECLIPSE RESULTS

An apparent research success

The total solar eclipse of March 7 (SN: 2/28, p. 227) may turn out to have been the most observed eclipse in history. The weather cooperated well over portions of the eclipse track where professional astronomers were gathered. "Not a cloud in the sky," is one astronomer's description of the scene near Miahuatlán, Mexico, where many expeditions were set up. By early this week the national eclipse coordinating center at the National Science Foundation had received many enthusiastic reports of success and very few notices of failure.

The weather was cloudy in Florida and Georgia and in Nova Scotia, disappointing many amateur astronomers and many tourists. But NSF says few professional astronomers had gone to those areas. Professionals who were not in Mexico were mainly clustered in southeast Virginia and adjacent North Carolina where the weather was clear.

Radio observations, less dependent on weather than optical ones, also went well according to all reports. Rocket-borne experiments sought information on solar radiation that does not come through the atmosphere and on changes in the upper atmosphere induced by the eclipse. Forty-five rockets were fired from the United States, 31 from Wallops Island, Va., and 14 from Elgin Air Force Base, Fla. Among these there were only three failures.

Two of the Wallops Island experiments didn't work, and one experiment package was lost at sea.

Two airplanes went up to follow the moon's shadow over the Pacific Ocean and afford observers a longer time under total eclipse than they could get standing on the ground. The aircraft belonging to the Air Force Cambridge Research Laboratories stayed in the shadow for 5 minutes 38 seconds, the one belonging to the Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory for 5 minutes 28 seconds.

It was an especially nice time to have such an available total eclipse, say astronomers, because the sun is now at the peak of its 11-year sunspot cycle. Though it will take time to analyze and calculate all the data obtained on March 7, some of the benefits are already apparent.

Radio astronomers at the National Radio Astronomy Observatory at Green Bank, W.Va., and at Tucson, Ariz., were watching as the edge of the moon crossed the sun's disk in the hope that it would help them locate the sources of different parts of the sun's radiation more precisely than with the one-minute resolution of telescopes alone.

Applied Physics Lab

The earth: Moon's shadow at left.

"We did quite well," says Dr. David Buhl. "We looked at four active regions, and at least one showed some structure that I can see from the strip-chart recorder," before the data are reduced to a map. They hope the map will distinguish features 10 seconds apart. Dr. Buhl concedes the expectation may be a bit optimistic, but he says, "the data look good so far." Dr. Buhl's partner in the sunspot map making, Dr. Michal Simon, who observed from Tucson, reports that everything went well there too.

"A rather strong spot surprised me," says Dr. Buhl. The bright spot he refers to was between 1 and 1.5 times the brightness of the solar background.

The bright spot is a relatively small region three or four minutes across, about a tenth the diameter of the solar disk. The sun has two belts of active regions, one in the north and one in the south; this spot is in the southern belt quite near the eastern edge of the sun.

At the beginning of the week Dr. Buhl did not yet know whether his bright spot corresponded to any optical feature of the sun since he had not seen a photograph of the sun taken at that hour, but optical observers in the Los Alamos airplanes saw an exceptionally active area, which might or might not correspond, on the eastern part of the sun. The Los Alamos plane also got pictures showing 9 or 10 extra long spikes extending out from the sun. This pattern is unique, says Dr. Arthur Cox, leader of the expedition, but since it was obtained with a new filter technique, it may be that such spikes are present from time to time and the new filter simply enabled them to be seen for the first time. □