

Campaign against cancer

The President's State of the Union message is primarily a vehicle for expressing broad goals and noble principles, and thus is generally short on specifics. Usually, however, at least one concrete nonpolitical proposal is included, to give the world something specific to chew on.

In 1970 President Nixon proposed funding water pollution control to the tune of \$10 billion in five years (SN: 1/31/70, p. 123). Last week, in a speech that included momentous proposals to reorganize the Federal bureaucracy and turn over to the states much of the revenue collected by the national Government, it was cancer research that was singled out for special attention.

The proposal recalled the flavor of President Kennedy's call for a national goal of landing an American on the moon by the end of the decade of the 1960's. Indeed, President Nixon's announcement that he will ask appropriation of an extra \$100 million "to launch an intensive campaign to find a cure for cancer" referred back to that technological achievement:

"The time has come when the same kind of concentrated effort that split the atom and took man to the moon should be turned toward conquering this dread disease. Let us make a total national commitment to achieve this goal."

Thus did the President accept much of the spirit of the recommendation in December of the Yarborough panel (SN: 12/19/70, p. 459) to amass a national campaign against cancer. Mr. Nixon, however, made no reference to the panel's request for creation of an independent agency called the National Cancer Authority. This left up in the air whether the money would be channeled mainly through the National Cancer Institute of the National Institutes of Health or through some other agency.

If the additional money is approved—Congressmen may find it difficult to vote against a cancer cure—it raises the same issues and problems surfaced by the Yarborough report itself. One concerns whether the appropriation would drain off funds from other areas of important research. Another concerns a more subtle question involving the sensitive issue, always present when discussing cancer, of possibly raising false hopes. As has been pointed out (SN: 1/2/71, p. 12), some progress has been made against certain types of cancer in the last 40 years, but the fundamental scientific knowledge necessary to achieve anything that might be called a victory

over cancer is not yet in hand. This contrasts with the moon-landing effort which, although complex, involved primarily the engineering application of known scientific principles. The public has perhaps not been sufficiently educated about this distinction, and most researchers would be careful to point out that one should not infer from the President's proposal that "a cure for cancer" necessarily will be soon found.

The cancer campaign was only part of one of the President's "six great goals" for the years ahead. It was included among a set of proposals for improving health care and making it more generally available. He will propose, said Mr. Nixon, a program to insure that no family is left without basic medical care because of inability to pay; a major increase in aid to medical schools; incentives to improve the delivery of health services, and new programs to encourage better preventive medicine. All these, of course, are proposals made countless times by countless groups. The questions involve how they are to be best brought about.

As for the environment, Mr. Nixon said the effort "so dramatically begun this past year" to protect the natural environment would be continued and a strong new set of initiatives to combat air, water and noise pollution would be proposed. He mentioned briefly his planned proposals to make better use of the land and to expand the nation's parks and recreation areas. To stimulate the lagging economy, another of the goals, Mr. Nixon plans to propose an expansionary budget. Scientific research is among the many expected to receive a healthy increase in Federal support.

The two goals creating the most controversy were the President's often-discussed intention to enact a plan to share Federal revenues with state and local governments, and his proposal to consolidate the executive branch into 8 instead of 12 cabinet departments. In the latter, the Departments of State, Defense, Justice and Treasury would remain; the other departments would be consolidated into departments of human resources, community development, natural resources and economic development. Broadscale opposition, as might have been expected, surfaced immediately. The proposed restructuring is of such broad scope and its implications so far-reaching that, given the practical political difficulties of achieving bureaucratic change, there seems little probability for positive action. Rep. Chet Holifield (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Government Operations Committee, which will handle the reorganization proposal when it is sent to Congress, called it a fairy tale. □

Worse, not better

One day in St. Louis in 1941, air pollution was so severe that it was impossible to see across the street. Aroused citizens launched a campaign to clean up the soft-coal-burning sources of pollution, and St. Louis air was cleared up considerably. The action was paralleled elsewhere in the nation and the world as methods were learned to reduce particulates from industrial stacks and as open burning of garbage was abandoned.

This first generation of air pollution abatement gradually shifted into today's effort, which might be termed the second generation. Now electrostatic instead of the less efficient mechanical precipitators remove fly ash from the emissions of burning coal. Elaborate devices are being designed to reduce the poisons released into the air from sources ranging from the automobile to atomic power plants.

Many of these efforts are failing, according to the participants of an air pollution symposium at Louisiana State University this week. Their consensus was that unless more money is spent on research and development, there will be no choice but to go to a third generation of control: Authorities will have to say to polluters not that they must install control devices but rather, in the words of one of the speakers, Jean Schuneman of the Maryland Health Department, "shut it down, move it or don't do it."

In terms of visually obvious pollutants, the situation today is less severe than it was in St. Louis in 1941. But according to the symposium participants modern pollution is often of a different variety, and exponential increases in population and consumption make the problem more urgent today. In 1941, there was time to do something before the problem grew worse. Today, there is not.

"In 1970 in Los Angeles, there were more first-stage air pollution alerts [when photochemical oxidants exceeded 0.5 parts per million and all sporting events and physical education classes were canceled] than in the history of the area," says Dr. J. N. Pitts of the University of California at Riverside. "We had three first-stage alerts on carbon monoxide [levels in excess of 50 parts per million] last week." Added Nobel laureate Dr. Willard F. Libby, who spoke at the symposium on the need for environmental generalists: "Los Angeles has become virtually uninhabitable."

It has been only in the past year, Dr. Pitts asserts, that there has been widespread awareness of the worsening situation. Before that, he says, the public—