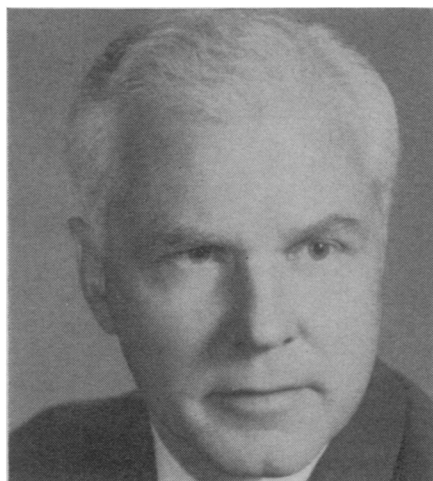


DuVal for Egeberg



Univ. of Ariz.

Dr. DuVal: The job itself is on trial.

Last week President Nixon nominated Dr. Merlin K. DuVal Jr. to the nation's top health post—Assistant Secretary for Health and Scientific Affairs in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. If the nomination is approved by Congress Dr. DuVal will succeed Dr. Roger O. Egeberg who has publicly stated his dissatisfaction with the position. Dr. Egeberg will become a Presidential consultant.

Political and philosophical squabbles, a six-month vacancy in 1969 and Government policy shifts have taken much of the power and political prestige out of the HEW position. It has degenerated to an administrative post in a weighty bureaucracy struggling in the past few years against slow-downs in Federal health and science spending. Some of the original policy- and decision-making aspects of the job have been taken over by other Administration advisory positions. For example, Dr. Edward E. David, director of the Office of Science and Technology and President Nixon's top science adviser, moved into the health arena by helping promote Mr. Nixon's cancer attack.

In an effort to put some strength and responsibility back into the job, the White House announced that "Dr. DuVal will be responsible for the development of health programs and providing executive leadership and direction to the programs and activities conducted within HEW and health agencies. His responsibilities will also include developing health policy, determining priorities and guiding program implementation."

This is the type of backing that induced Dr. DuVal to take the job after he and at least two other physicians had turned it down. "The job itself is on trial," says Dr. DuVal, "and it needs filling." He feels that he can

What areas of cancer research might be given priority under either S. 34 or S. 1828? "We don't know," an NCI spokesman admits. "But by far the most exciting work at NCI now suggests that cancer is either caused by viruses, or that viruses play some role in carcinogenesis" (SN: 10/4/69, p. 308). The Yarborough panel saw virus research receiving top priority, as well as these areas: cell and tumor biology, immunology, epidemiology, cancer prevention, diagnosis, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, surgery and combinations of treatment. The introduction of carcinogenic compounds into the environment also needs attention, Dr. Robert Q. Marston, director of NIH, contends.

While NCI is the major source of public funding for cancer research in the United States, the American Cancer Society is the largest private funder. Irving Rimer, an ACS vice president, gives ACS' view of an enlarged or replicated NCI: "ACS has long supported the need for an independent cancer agency. Fifty-two million persons are destined to get cancer in our lifetime, or one out of four persons. The ACS has been on record for a number of years favoring a \$300 million budget for NCI. The Yarborough panel recommended we go to a billion dollars annually by 1976. Nixon is putting the whole thing in high gear. He is the first President to do that."

How do private foundations funding other major disease research view the preferential treatment cancer research is receiving on Capitol Hill? States Charles Bennett, director of public relations at the Arthritis Foundation: "Our feelings are comparable to those of other concerns. Nixon, I believe, promised that whatever money will be needed to cure cancer will be made available. Everybody wishes enough money could be given to lick other diseases too. The Arthritis Foundation is not criticizing cancer funding, but we are concerned about the low priority given arthritis."

Yet there is no doubt that an assault on cancer could lead to spinoff in other areas of research. Arthritis, for example, could profit from cancer immunity research. A latent virus is suspect in both rheumatoid arthritis and cancer. Something sets body machinery off the wrong way so the immune system works against the body instead of for it.

The larger question, it seems, is why was cancer singled out in the first place, since heart disease is the number one killer in this country? "It's my guess," asserts Bennett, "that cancer has created a built-in fear in people. I can see why the most-feared disease would be picked first." This is undoubtedly true, yet one can't help

questioning whether the current cancer urgency smacks of the pervasive human fetish about stalling death. Perhaps research monies might be more wisely channeled toward making our already lengthy lifespan more enjoyable. How about the pressing need to conquer birth defects, improve health care in the ghetto, or cure chronic diseases that afflict older people, before increasing our lifespan still further and intensifying the population problem? True, cancer can be a dreadfully prolonged and excruciatingly painful disease. True, these other problems are also getting stepped-up Federal funding. Yet not a few scientists fear that a crash cancer effort, regardless of political color, might raise false hopes among the public.

As one cancer researcher points out, "With both the atom splitting and the moon landing, we were applying principles already laid down. But with cancer we don't have any principles, since we don't know how the disease works at the cell level. Cancer research has been ongoing for 200 years. We might find answers in a decade, or in a century, or never. For when we're dealing with cancer, we may be dealing with the mystery of life itself."

And unfortunately there is substantial evidence of Americans getting unduly exercised about the pending crash cancer thrusts. Sen. Robert Dole (R-Kan.) has received 8,000 letters, nearly all supporting a cancer program. Not a few of these letters, a spokesman from his office admits, were generated by Ann Landers' column. Explains a staff assistant of Sen. J. Glenn Beall Jr. (R-Md.): "We too have received a flood of mail. People are for cancer research, more often than not for keenly personal, immediate reasons. Very few of them seem to understand the purport of the bills."

Storm Whaley, associate director for communication, NIH, puts the problems succinctly:

"Cancer is such a personal matter for many people. It's almost cruel to create unrealistic expectations. Still, additional efforts might produce results." And this is precisely why the President, apart from his bill for a super cancer program, has asked Congress to approve \$100 million for cancer research in fiscal 1972 in addition to the \$232 million originally requested. The \$100 million increment has already been approved by the House Appropriations Committee.

"I'm all for raising the visibility and urgency of cancer research," asserts Columbia's Spiegelman. "Increasing the effort and money will certainly catalyze the information required to control the disease. Even if we gain half a year, it would help thousands of people." □

fill it properly or he would not have accepted it, he says.

Dr. DuVal has impressive administrative and health credentials. He is a 48-year-old surgeon from New Jersey who was assistant director of the University of Oklahoma Medical School from 1962 to 1964. Since then he has proved himself as an administrator and leader at the University of Arizona in Tucson where he started and is at present dean of the college of medicine.

He is obviously acceptable to the White House, and his reputation within the medical profession has won him the enthusiastic support of the American Medical Association. And, unlike Dr. John Knowles (SN: 5/10/69, p. 451), no Senator has as yet taken offense at his political or philosophical positions or ambitions. □

MARIJUANA HEARINGS

Questioning the legal status

United States customs officials seized 104,303 pounds of marijuana in fiscal 1970. In the first nine months of fiscal 1971 they have already picked up 126,965 pounds of pot, says U.S. Commissioner of Customs Myles J. Ambrose. Facts and figures like these were presented this week as the President's National Commission on Marijuana and Drug Abuse started hearings in Washington. Hearings will continue throughout the summer.

Much will be said about the increase of marijuana use, but the primary interest of the commission is the legal status of the drug. Drs. Harold Kolansky and William T. Moore were called to restate their findings on the psychological effects of pot smoking (SN: 4/24/71, p. 277). "If nothing is done to strengthen marijuana enforcement now," added Dr. Kolansky, "heroin addiction will become as epidemic in two years as marijuana is now." As before, these views were attacked from many sides. Dr. Leon Wurmser of Johns Hopkins' Drug Abuse Center in Baltimore called the study useless and harmful because the clinical effects of cannabis do not "outweigh in seriousness or even balance the clinical effects of legal prosecution, legal inconsistency and imprisonment."

Dr. Bertram S. Brown, director of the National Institute of Mental Health, proposed that marijuana possession penalties be "minimal or non-existent." John E. Ingersol, director of the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, countered that cutting the penalty "would undermine the law."

The arguments seem partly in vain because at a May 1 news conference President Nixon said he would ignore any recommendation of the commission for legalizing marijuana. □

WATCH THE BIRDIE

Politics and the AEC budget

The U.S. Atomic Energy Commission is supposed to be somewhat apart from the hurly-burly of politics. Established to be the guardian of the nation's present and long-term interest in atomic energy and related fields, it is expected, publicly at least, to pay more attention to the principles of physics than the principles of winning elections in the waterfront wards.

Last week the AEC went to the Congressional Joint Committee on Atomic Energy to ask for an amendment to its budget authorization for fiscal year 1972 that would add \$48.3 million to the original request of slightly more than \$2 billion. The questions the committeemen asked and the answers they got tend to show that several of the additional requests came about because the AEC is playing the role of birdie in a many-sided political badminton game.

One of the important, though shadowy, players is the Office of Management and Budget, formerly the Bureau of the Budget. Those whose pet projects have been cut out of Federal budgets allege that the OMB is the real power in the Government, a kind of bureaucratic Cardinal Mazarin. The OMB denies such accusations; it says it is concerned only with the Government's bookkeeping. The truth must be somewhere between since it appears from the JCAE hearings that the OMB indeed has a good deal to say about who gets how much money.

The joint committee has an old score to settle with the OMB, or whoever is behind the OMB, over the question of what to do with the AEC's three gaseous-diffusion plants that make enriched uranium for reactor fuel, and a request for an additional \$9.2 million for these plants was the occasion for airing it.

The plants, at Paducah, Ky., Oak Ridge, Tenn., and Portsmouth, Ohio, take uranium hexafluoride gas and sep-

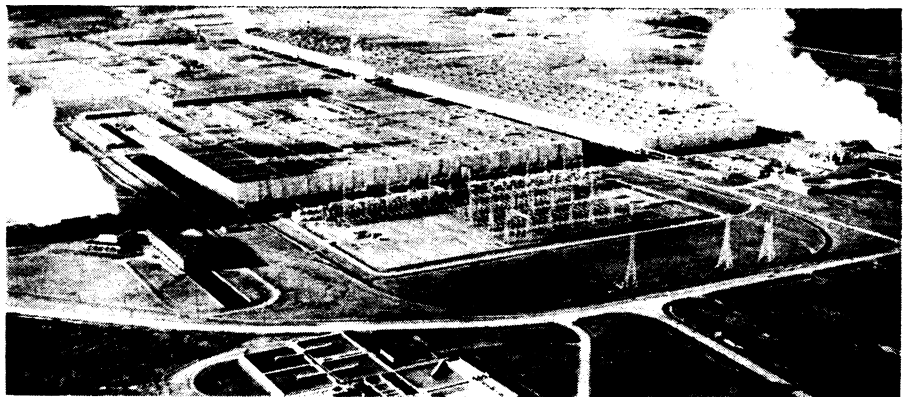
arate it into two streams, one in which the percentage of the fissionable isotope U-235 is higher than in the natural gas and one in which it is lower. The enriched gas is used to make fuel elements. The AEC is requesting the \$9.2 million to decrease the amount of enrichment in the product of the plants, contending that increased cost of electric power makes operation at the lower enrichment level more economical.

But the joint committee has a more comprehensive plan for Cascade, as the fuel enrichment program is called, and it has authorized money for this in the past. Rep. Craig Hosmer (R-Calif.) remarked: "It does little good to authorize \$16 million and not spend it."

Sen. John O. Pastore (D-R.I.), chairman of the joint committee, added: "We get into a lot of hocus-pocus. We authorize money, and money is frozen. We get ourselves very well involved in half measures and never get to the whole thing."

The \$16 million was authorized last year as part of a program to improve the gaseous-diffusion plants and upgrade their capacity to produce the fuel. The OMB has frozen this money, and the committeemen are furious. They want to know the official reason why, but the AEC doesn't know it, and the OMB so far hasn't told.

The reason probably has to do with the Administration's desire to sell the plants to private concerns. The joint committee, fearing another Dixon-Yates affair, refuses to countenance any such thing. Instead it pushes its Cascade Improvement Program to expand the plants under Government ownership. The Administration refuses to spend the money appropriated for the purpose, some suggest, because it doesn't want to improve property it intends to sell. The AEC position in this is one of "studied neutrality," according to a spokesman. In its heart of hearts the AEC would probably like to keep and expand the plants, but it doesn't dare say so.



AEC

Portsmouth enrichment plant: Whether to expand or sell is the question.