

## Technology assessment: After years of effort, OTA is a reality

On Oct. 13, President Nixon signed the Technology Assessment Act of 1972. Last week, House and Senate leaders appointed the 12 members of the bipartisan Technology Assessment Board that will control the new Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) created by the act. Several men are now lobbying to be named director of the OTA, but a man who does not have to lobby (according to observers), former Rep. Emilio Q. Daddario (D-Conn.), is rumored to be the "premier candidate." As chairman of the House subcommittee on science, research and development, Daddario was the originator and constant advocate of the idea of a technology assessment capability for Congress. The OTA director will also serve as the 13th, non-voting, member of the board.

The need for a technology assessment capability for Congress is phrased this way in the bill itself: ". . . It is essential that, to the fullest extent possible, the consequences of technological applications be anticipated, understood, and considered in determination of public policy on existing and emerging national problems. . . . The Federal agencies presently responsible directly to the Congress are not designed to provide the legislative branch with adequate and timely information, independently developed, relating to the potential impact of technological applications. . . ." Others are more blunt. They say that executive agencies, often as promoters of certain new technologies or projects, have made serious misjudgments about the environmental, social and biological impacts. Various Senators and Congressmen have been critical of the agencies regarding such technological *causes célèbres* as the Trans-Alaska pipeline proposal, the supersonic transport, Western state coal developments, nuclear reactor safety, the urban use of automobiles and a dozen others. The legislators have charged bias and distortion or even, in the case of the SST, the withholding of key findings from Congress. (Although there was some speculation that President Nixon might veto the OTA bill, he apparently felt doing so would be a rebuke Congress would view as intolerable.)

Not that the new act will immediately create a massive technology assessment capability for Congress that would rival the capabilities of the Federal agencies; authorized funding for the first two years is only \$2.5 million annually, and Rep. John W. Davis (D-Ga.), who succeeded Daddario in the House subcommittee post when the Connecticut Congressman left Congress in 1970, admits in an editorial in *CHEMICAL AND ENGINEERING NEWS* (Oct. 9) that "it will probably take in the neighborhood of five years for OTA to firmly establish itself as a valuable tool for Congress."

But appointments to the OTA board last week indicate a potential for a dynamic and powerful new Congressional watchdog. The 12-member board, which will have power to initiate technology assessments, is made up of three Democrats and three Republicans from each house. The appointments indicate that this bipartisanship is not just a *pro forma* matter. Apparently the selections were worked out behind the scenes with a view to maximum effectiveness without regard to partisan differences. On the Senate side, the members are Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.), Hubert H. Humphrey (D-Minn.), Ernest F. Hollings (D-S.C.), Richard S. Schweiker (R-Pa.), and Gordon Allott and Peter H. Dominick, both Colorado Republicans. Kennedy was a prime sponsor of the OTA legislation in the Senate, and Humphrey, Allott and Schweiker are all



Kennedy, Davis and the "premier candidate," Daddario.

either co-sponsors of the bill or known to be friendly to Kennedy and his desire for a strong OTA. Hollings is chairman of a legislative appropriations subcommittee that could play a key role in OTA funding. Only Dominick does not appear to fit in any particular niche on the board; it is possible the Colorado conservative was added mainly for balance.

On the House side, the members are Davis, Mike McCormack (D-Wash.), Earle Cabell (D-Texas), Charles A. Mosher (R-Ohio), James Harvey (R-Mich.), and Charles Gubser (R-Calif.). Davis, Cabell, Mosher and McCormack are all members of the House Science and Astronautics Committee. Cabell is ranking majority member of the Davis subcommittee (next to Davis) and McCormack is also a member of this subcommittee. As ranking minority member on Science and Astronautics, Mosher is an ex officio member of all subcommittees, including the Davis one. McCormack, incidentally, is the only scientist on the OTA board. These four OTA members are all likely, at the very least, to be open to arguments for a strong OTA.

Observers had earlier feared the OTA bill would be gutted by the September passage of a surprise floor amendment introduced in the House by Jack Brooks (D-Texas). The amendment would have eliminated the public membership provided in the Davis subcommittee version and given the majority party a 6-4 majority on the OTA board, thus subjecting it to day-to-day partisan pressures and likely eliminating a good deal of the potential for objectivity. The Senate version provided for the bipartisan balance; although this version did not call for public membership on the OTA board, it asked for establishment of an expert advisory council to OTA. Both of these provisions made it through conference to the final bill. Other strengthening Senate provisions that made it to final passage provided for a continuing (rather than year-by-year) authorization of funds, and reduced the power of the existing Congressional Research Service (CRS) in the administration of OTA.

The advisory council will consist of 10 members of the public, to be appointed by the OTA board "who shall be persons eminent in one or more fields of the physical, biological or social sciences or engineering or experienced in the administration of technological activities" plus the controller general and the director of the CRS. The council will be able to recommend specific technology assessments and to review assessments already completed or in progress.

OTA will have no laboratories or research facilities itself and will contract out most assessments to industry, academia or other government agencies. The board will have power, however, to initiate "ad hoc" task forces for special purposes. OTA will work closely with the National Science Foundation to avoid duplication and to exchange information on techniques of technology assessment.

The OTA board will listen to recommendations from chairmen and ranking minority members of the numerous Congressional committees involved with science, technology and the environment before deciding on specific assessments. Sponsors hope the new Congressional office may be operating sometime early next year.