

Science and the White House Reexamining the roles

Science adviser's resignation, rumors of shakeups
in OST and PSAC produce uncertain climate

January in Washington is usually a time of stress. Government officials are afraid to talk, answer the telephone or even think out loud about the President's budget for the new fiscal year—announced at the end of the month. But this year it is worse than ever, as one by one top Government advisers and officials announce their resignations or are assigned to new posts. A hint of what else is to come was President Nixon's announcement last week of the creation of a super cabinet that would cut across traditional agency lines and his reiterated intention to reduce the staffs of many agencies.

One of the most unexpected announcements was the resignation of Edward E. David Jr., the President's science adviser. "I knew about it when I read it in the paper," said one member of PSAC, the President's Science Advisory Committee, which David chaired. But at the time David's departure was made public, published reports were speculating that the Office of Science and Technology (OST), which he directs, would subsequently be trimmed and phased into another branch of the executive branch such as the Office of Management and Budget. There was also speculation that Nixon would accept the resignations of the members of PSAC.

Nixon is said to have offered David another job in the Government. But David opted instead to become vice president and director of Gould, Inc., a Chicago manufacturer of electronic equipment. Some sources said David's resignation was not in anger but due to disappointment that his advice had not been heeded. Others said there was no acrimony whatsoever. David, already at his job in Chicago, did not respond to requests for amplification.

What all this means to science and its representation at the highest levels of Government is not clear. But changes are probably inevitable. "We strongly

suspect that the traditional PSAC will not continue. What form it will take we don't know," says one member of the 20-man committee. There are several reasons: changing times, shifting roles of advisory committees and changing relationships between the adviser and advisee (SN: 10/7/72, p. 236), rethinking on the relevance of advice itself, and the Administration's less than enthusiastic attitude toward science and technology in general.

Twenty years ago when PSAC was created, the committee spent most of its time looking into basic science related to military research. Now PSAC studies are oriented more to social problems such as health care, transportation and energy sources.

While the problems have changed, so have attitudes about advisory groups as a whole. "There have been some difficult times in the past," says one PSAC member. "The relationship between PSAC and the President has been slowly deteriorating over the last 10 years." This reference was to occasions when PSAC members were outspoken in their criticism of the Government's military and Vietnam policy. "The President doesn't take advice that is negative to the policy he is already pursuing. Even when the advice is objective [which is rare], he weighs it politically," added an ex-member. But most feel they ought to have a mechanism to give the advice anyway. PSAC is a symbol of that scientific prestige at the White House.

Does the President need advice? A remarkable number of members of the current establishment say no. They contend what he needs is a small group that can study the possibilities in an unbiased way and present to him his options and the results of pursuing a given course. "This is an analyzed approach," explains one Government official. "All advice ends up as special pleading no matter what you are talk-



OST
David: Two years in the White House.

ing about. And special pleading does not help the President make decisions," he asserted. "Why have a special committee for science?" he asks. "Science is not a separate thing, but an approach to doing things."

Most feel even if PSAC is dissolved, the professional staff of about 22 members of OST will still be around—either intact or reduced, or absorbed somewhere else in the Government. The new budget should tell the story. Meanwhile, the scientific community and Washington remain in a state of suspended animation. □

NASA orders cutbacks, satellite project killed

NASA announced last week it is cutting \$200 million out of its current expenditures—action "required to reduce total Government spending to the \$250 billion target set by the President for fiscal year 1973." But one despondent scientist remarked: "This is just the pruning before the real amputations begin."

NASA said it was making the cuts now—only a month in advance of the President's 1974 budget proposal "to save the maximum amount of money." This, NASA-watchers took as an ill omen for the 1974 budget. Congress had approved \$3.4 billion for the 1973 fiscal year to end in June, but the current cuts bring the budget back to \$3.2 billion.

The cuts affect all areas of NASA research and development, including the space shuttle, which will be slowed down, delaying the first orbital flight. But the biggest blow to science was the announced "suspension" of work on the High Energy Astronomy Observatory (HEAO), originally scheduled to fly in 1975. Its life was in jeopardy last year as well, when the ax fell instead on the planetary Grand Tour (SN:1/

Resolutions and reformation at the AAAS

Bombs fell on North Vietnam in record numbers for two weeks just before the American Association for the Advancement of Science met in Washington for its 139th annual meeting (SN: 1/6/73, p. 4). The bombs left their mark in Indochina and at the AAAS meeting. Antiwar rallies were formed and petitions were signed. When the legislative council of the 130,000-member AAAS met on the last day of the meeting, two strongly worded resolutions related to the war were passed.

One, directly related to the post-election bombing escalation, called for an immediate withdrawal of all U.S. armed forces in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. States the resolution: "As scientists we cannot remain silent while the richest and most powerful nation of the 20th century uses the resources of modern science to intervene destructively in the problems of poor and distant lands."

In another statement, the council resolved that the AAAS endorse the purposes of the Vietnam War Ecological Damages Assessment Act of 1972. This act, proposed by Sen. Gaylord Nelson (D-Wis.) and Rep. Gilbert Gude (R-Md.), calls on President Nixon and the National Academy of Sciences to assess and report to the public on the ecological effects (constructive as well as destructive) of the application of American science in Indochina.

The AAAS council also endorsed the findings of the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future (SN: 3/18/72, p. 181) and called for increased funding for population sciences research. In other resolutions, the AAAS urged "that reference to the theory of creation, which is neither scientifically grounded nor capable of performing the roles of scientific theories, not be required in textbooks and other classroom materials intended for use in science curricula," and that "scientists be selective in the usage of nonhuman primates and that governments contribute to the conservation needs of nonhuman primates by all feasible means."

"Certainly the timeliness and political implications of some of these resolutions give the impression that the AAAS council is becoming more socially conscious and politically aware of the uses of science and technology," says Richard Scribner, AAAS meeting director. But even without the background and stimulation of increased bombing in North Vietnam, it is evident that the AAAS is on its way to becoming a more responsive organization. The major portion of the council meeting was taken up with the discussion and ratification of a new set of bylaws that implement and amplify the constitution approved at last year's AAAS meeting. The major thrust of these two documents is aimed at making the AAAS a more democratic organization with increased membership participation.

The legislative council, for instance, will be reduced in size from an unwieldy 550 persons to a more manageable 100. So streamlined, this representative body should find it possible to meet more than once a year and thus be more responsive to the needs of the association membership. In another change, the board of directors and the president-elect of the association will no longer be elected by the council but by popular vote. In effect, the AAAS will become more oriented toward its membership and less toward affiliated societies. Members will have direct links to the council.

Discussing these changes in governance, Leonard Rieser of Dartmouth, the new president-elect of the AAAS, emphasized the strengthening of the association's various disciplinary and interdisciplinary sections. In addition to stimulating communication among scientists, Rieser says the changes will encourage the members of these groups to be more concerned about the advancement, public understanding and use of science, and to get more involved in the AAAS. After all, he says, "one presumes that people who join the AAAS are more than just subscribers to SCIENCE magazine."

29/72, p. 71). In August NASA slipped HEAO to 1976 to save money (SN: 12/2/72, p. 358).

HEAO was classified as a high priority recommendation of various scientific advisory groups. NASA chose to cut into it rather than Viking (the 1976 Mars landers) or the Jupiter-Saturn fly-bys. "We are going back to the study-phase with HEAO to see if we can develop an alternate plan," said one NASA scientist. But other scientists weren't as optimistic. "HEAO is dead," says Herbert Friedman of the Naval Research Laboratory, "at least in the form we have been pursuing."

Other cuts included phasing out work on communications satellites and cancellation of work on the quiet short take-off and landing research aircraft. Work on nuclear propulsion will be discontinued. The Plum Brook Station near Sandusky, Ohio, where nuclear power testing is conducted, will be closed. There was no mention at all of the recommended Pioneer Venus mission.

Said one scientist of the state of affairs, "There is just not much of an audience to plead for science." □

Medical programs due for major cutbacks

The Government's budget proposal for fiscal 1974 will not be released until late this month, but the advance word in the medical area is that a number of Federal health services will be eliminated or reduced.

The 26-year-old Hill-Burton hospital construction program, which built \$13 billion worth of hospitals in 4,000 communities, will be phased out. So will the Regional Medical Program, designed by the Johnson Administration to bring health care to more Americans. Community health planning is cut 10 percent. There are no funds for maternal and child health, family planning programs or comprehensive health services. Research training for medical students will be eliminated. These cuts are somewhat offset by the President's Health Services Formula Grants, whereby states will apply Federal funds for health care.

Some medical research will receive increased funding. The streamlined Na-

tional Cancer Institute (SN: 5/13/72, p. 309) will get the lion's share. Heart research is next in line for an increase. Research in birth control, environmental health and venereal diseases will also receive more funds. Emergency medical services, one of the President's pet projects, will be funded at the present \$15 million. Further details regarding National Institutes of Health programs will not be known until the budget is released; a decrease of \$42 million in other research money is anticipated. Which type research will be hit will be a matter of great interest.

Some medical spokesmen—John A. D. Cooper, president of the Association of American Medical Colleges, Louis G. Welt, president of the Association of Professors of Medicine, others—have protested the cuts. Congress will probably pressure the President to reinstate some of the funds. But the chances of his doing so are slim since the new Secretary of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare is Caspar W. Weinberger, who helped design the cuts for the Administration's Office of Management and Budget. □