

The Nixon-science gap



Dirksen: Appointment stopper.



Dr. Knowles: Still waiting.

Less than three weeks after an incident that shook the scientific community's waning expectations of a friendly relationship with the White House, President Richard M. Nixon dramatically turned to mending fences.

His veto on April 11 of the appointment of Dr. Franklin A. Long as director of the National Science Foundation (SN: 5/3, p. 421) was met with waves of protest from scientists, who charged that by injecting politics into the non-political NSF the President threatened the role of that agency and any harmony between themselves and Government.

Dr. Long's opposition to deployment of the antiballistic missile system and objections to his appointment from Sen. Everett Dirksen (R-Ill.) and Rep. James Fulton (R-Penn.) caused Nixon to change his mind about Dr. Long at the eleventh hour.

But last week, the President conceded his error to members of the Council of the National Academy of Sciences and to members of the Na-

tional Science Board who had placed Long's name in nomination for the NSF directorship.

The President called the prominent scientists to the White House to recant on his previous stand, which had been tantamount to saying that any scientist who could not support the ABM could not head NSF. He now affirmed the agency's traditional nonpolitical role as a source of support for basic scientific research. He also reported that after realizing his mistake, he asked Dr. Long if he would allow his name to be resubmitted for the post. Dr. Long, who previously refused to revise his stand on the ABM, this time refused to be reconsidered for the appointment, saying he had no wish to see the case reopened.

The President's public apology over the incident was a considerable victory for the scientists. But other issues still stand in the way of easy relations with the President.

One of those is the situation surrounding the appointment of Dr. John Knowles as assistant secretary for health and scientific affairs in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Secretary Robert H. Finch of HEW clearly wants the top health spot in HEW to go to Dr. Knowles. According to Dr. Frederick Seitz, president of the NAS, who was present at the White House meeting, Nixon was not entirely aware that the post was still empty.

Dr. Seitz reported—in substance—a conversation between the President and his science adviser, Dr. Lee A. DuBridge, while the scientists were present.

Nixon, according to Seitz, pointed to the fact that all top Administration posts in science were filled. Dr. DuBridge reminded him that there was an exception: the assistant secretaryship at HEW.

Nixon expressed surprise that the Knowles appointment was still hanging. "I have approved him," he commented.

It has not been finalized yet, said DuBridge.

Oh yes, recalled the President, It is being held up by the Senate.

Senate opposition to Dr. Knowles centers around Senator Dirksen, who has declared he will block Dr. Knowles appointment when it comes to the Senate for approval.

Dr. Knowles, whose hospital has decided it will perform no human heart transplants because the \$40,000-\$50,000 that would go for even one could be better spent curing public health problems in the Boston slums, is opposed by the conservative American Medical Association, and the AMA is

behind Senator Dirksen's stand. Speaking officially for the AMA, president Dwight Wilbur says that the association has recommended several other persons for the post of Assistant Secretary for Health and Scientific Affairs, urging that he be a man who broadly represents the medical community. Dr. Knowles is a stronger advocate of broad distribution of health care than is the AMA. And, though Finch has not reneged on the offer of the job, the appointment has never been formally made.

In the Senate, which will have to approve the appointment, Dr. Knowles has the backing of Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) who told Secretary Finch, as long ago as Jan. 31, that the Administration and the country should be proud to have John Knowles as assistant secretary. Dr. Knowles, who states that "it is totally inappropriate for me to make any comment on the situation," obviously relishes the thought of entering the political arena. "I thrive on the heat," he says, and he plans to sit tight until the battle between Finch and Dirksen is resolved.

REGULATION

New deadline for labs

Time is running out for cut-rate mail-order clinical laboratories (SN: 2/18/67, p. 161).

April 1 was the original date set for labs soliciting or accepting specimens in interstate commerce to be licensed by the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare. Secretary Robert H. Finch has moved the effective date to July 1, but this means that laboratories must have their applications in the hands of the director of the National Communicable Disease Center in Atlanta, Ga., by May.

Dr. David J. Sencer, director of NCDC, asked the Secretary to change the effective date of the act because of the number of laboratories that still need to be inspected before being approved for licensure.

Dr. Sencer says it has long been recognized that unregulated mail-order types of laboratories offer a threat to the health of both the individual and the public. States such as California and New York, which have enacted regulatory legislation, are not protected from laboratories in other states that offer mail-order services.

Regulations for laboratory efficiency include equipment and materials used in tests, proficiency in testing, personnel adequacy and quality control. <