

Congress: Toward a National Policy for the Environment

The efforts of the government and people of the United States to prevent degradation of their national environment have usually been too fragmented and too late. The public and its governmental representatives are becoming concerned about their inability to foresee and forestall the nation's environmental erosion.

One of the main difficulties in dealing with the general problem of the environment is that no single group, either within government or outside it, feels that it has the power to try to deal with the environment as a whole. Those who do have power have responsibility only for selected segments. In an effort to overcome the piecemeal approach to these issues, the House Committee on Science and Astronautics and the Senate Interior Committee joined for an unusual day-long House-Senate Colloquium on 17 July to discuss the need for a national policy for the environment.

The colloquium agreed that the nation must do much more and do it quickly if the environment is not to be further degraded, but there was less than complete agreement about the elements of a national policy for the environment. The colloquium consisted of statements and responses by leading officials of the Executive Branch; speeches, questions, and challenges by congressmen; and, later, questions and comments by leading scientists. Members of Congress who participated included Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.), chairman of the Senate Interior Committee; George P. Miller (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Committee on Science and Astronautics; and Emilio Q. Daddario (D-Conn.), chairman of the Subcommittee on Science, Research, and Development (Daddario was given credit for being the main instigator of the colloquium, which was a further indication of his expanding activities in the scientific field). The principal Executive Branch participants included Presidential science adviser Donald F. Hornig, Interior Secretary Stewart Udall,

and several other cabinet officials. Conservationist Laurance S. Rockefeller also testified.

One of the difficulties with the meeting was the fact that it was not a true colloquium; at least in the morning session, it was more like a traditional congressional committee meeting, where congressmen played their customary role as hard-nosed inquisitors of outside witnesses. At one point, Edmund S. Muskie (D-Maine), chairman of the Senate Public Works Subcommittee on Air and Water Pollution, speaking to the outside participants said that none of them had told the congressmen what our national environmental policy should be. True as this may have been, it was also true that most of the congressmen present seemed not to have given much thought to the elements of such a policy. Some of the Executive Branch representatives present explained what a fine job their own departments had done in preserving the parts of the environment charged to their care—a defense which did not satisfy some congressmen, including Muskie and Richard L. Ottinger (D-N.Y.). Ottinger attacked the departments represented for defiling the environment and was critical of three other Executive Branch “villains” who were not represented—the Department of Transportation, the Federal Power Commission, and the dam-building Corps of Engineers. Ottinger had two suggestions of his own: (i) that a public intervener on behalf of the environment be created, and (ii) that a vehicle to facilitate communication between the scientific community and public officials be established.

The need for better communication between scientists and officials was mentioned at other times during the meeting. Secretary Udall told the congressmen that they could not properly oversee the Executive Branch until they obtained better scientific advice, and that Congress shouldn't be so “bashful” about spending money for its own staffing. The Secretary

pointed out that his own Interior Department had created an Office of Ecology, and he said we must “begin to obey the dictates of ecology, giving this master science a new and central position in the Federal scientific establishment.”

The desirability of giving more weight to the advice of ecologists by creating a Council of Ecological Advisers or a Council on Environmental Quality has been stressed in several bills introduced recently in Congress. A report, “Managing the Environment,” issued this year by the House Subcommittee on Science, Research, and Development calls for the inclusion of ecologists in the membership of the President's Science Advisory Committee (PSAC) and in other high-level groups which affect the management of the environment, and for the creation of a PSAC panel on the environment.*

At the colloquium there were several pleas made for better coordination and organization within the government. Executive officials talked of the need for a better coordinated Congress (environmental questions in Congress are now handled by several different committees); congressmen talked of the need for a reorganized Executive Branch (environmental questions now receive fragmentary attention in a host of governmental agencies).

White House science adviser Donald Hornig was skeptical about the wisdom of creating a new organizational entity to deal with environmental problems. To give humorous emphasis to his point, he quoted Petronius Arbiter, a Roman official in the time of the Emperor Nero, who said: “We tend to meet any new situation by reorganizing. And a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency and demoralization.” Hornig said that he thought a strengthening of staff capacity at the Executive Office level was “at least as attractive” as creating a new organization to deal with the environment. Despite such reservations, there were some at the

*Copies of this report can be obtained from the Subcommittee, 2321 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington D.C. Copies of a report, “A National Policy for the Environment,” issued in July by the Senate Interior Committee, can be obtained from that committee, 3106 New Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. Copies of the transcript of the environmental colloquium, together with additional comments from participants, can be obtained from either of the above addresses after 1 September. There is no charge for any of these documents.

colloquium who favored the establishment of either a permanent or a short-term national commission on the environment.

Although there were disparate lines of argument about how to arrive at a national policy for the environment, there seemed to be agreement that the need for comprehensive environmental management was an urgent one. In his prepared statement, Secretary Udall did not hesitate to condemn activities of his own Executive branch as he deplored "the inexorable highway construction, the obnoxious boom of supersonic aircraft, the dam building . . . [and] the pernicious concept of calculated obsolescence that fouls our countryside." Udall said that almost every federal program posed a threat to our environment.

An inevitable complaint about meetings such as the environmental colloquium is that they deal only in generalities and don't get down to the hard individual problems. Smithsonian Secretary S. Dillon Ripley commented at the meeting that it was all very pleasant for the group to sit around in their white collars and engage in "gaseous interchanges" but that what the scientists should really be doing is training

people for grass roots work in ecology, biology, and the other relevant scientific disciplines. Senator Jackson commented that incorporation of the concept of "environmental quality" into the governmental decision-making process was a growing and popular idea. "As a generalization," Jackson noted, "it has great appeal. It doesn't take much courage, for example to come out foursquare in favor of a quality life for all Americans—as long as we don't get too specific about what we mean."

Secretary Udall argued that the basic question was one of funding: "Are we willing to pay for a quality environment?" Udall said that the nation could write laws but that they would go "nowhere" if adequate appropriations were not provided. One illustration which could have been cited to back up Udall's argument was that of the International Biological Program (IBP). Several of the participants, including Senator Jackson (who quoted a June speech by the President), spoke warmly of the IBP. What the participants did not mention was that the Administration has been very hesitant about giving the requested financial support for this program (*Science*, 24

May). As Udall said at another point in his presentation, it is unrealistic to think that the nation can solve a broad range of tough policy and organizational issues "by putting the stamp of approval on some booming rhetoric."

Nonetheless, "booming rhetoric" is sometimes the first step toward action, and the fact that this congressional colloquium was held at all may be an indication that the Congress will move to grapple with environmental problems in a more comprehensive manner. A meeting which brought together relevant officials from both House and Senate, from several Executive agencies, and from the scientific community could be a promising portent. Congressman Miller said that he and Senator Jackson were so pleased by the success of the colloquium that they planned to hold a similar meeting early next year.

In summing up, Don K. Price, dean of the John Fitzgerald Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, who acted as rapporteur for the colloquium, wryly stated that the problem with the environment is that people are involved with it, and he ventured the prediction that there would be enough environmental problems to provide agenda for many years to come.—BRYCE NELSON

Research Probe: Rickover Broad-sides "Military-Scientific Complex"

"President Eisenhower mentioned the industrial-military complex . . . I have mentioned the military-scientific complex. I think this is the really dangerous one."

—ADMIRAL HYMAN G. RICKOVER

A significant number of congressmen are wary of some of the activities of the Defense Department, especially in the funding of research in the social sciences. These suspicious members recently gained further support from the ranks of the military research community when Admiral Hyman G. Rickover testified in closed session before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee a couple of months ago. (His testimony was released on 19 July.) The hearing was the second that the Foreign Relations Committee has held recently on

Defense Department-sponsored foreign affairs research. In the first meeting the committee grilled John S. Foster, Jr., director of Defense Research and Engineering (*Science*, 24 May).*

Rickover is the U.S. Navy's Deputy Commander for Nuclear Propulsion, Naval Ship Systems Command, and director of the Naval Reactors Division for the Atomic Energy Commission. He has long had the reputation of being a sharp-tongued "maverick" who shows little hesitation about publicly discussing issues outside his field of professional competence. He undoubtedly qualifies as the most outspoken witness from the Defense Department payroll to

*Copies of the transcripts of the hearings with Rickover and Foster can be obtained without charge from the Documents Room, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C. 20501.

appear before congressional committees.

In addition to saying that "much of the DOD's social science research has been a waste of the taxpayer's money," Rickover was critical of the massive power of the DOD itself. "It may be difficult to regain control of the DOD," Rickover argued, "Yet, if its empire-building is not restrained, it may become the most powerful branch of the National Government. This surely was not intended by the Founding Fathers; nor, I feel sure, is it the will of the American people." Rickover said that the DOD had been able to gain so much power because, in a period of "cold war," the DOD could obtain vast appropriations for almost any purpose it had in mind. "Being the most richly endowed of all the executive departments," he argued, "DOD is naturally the most powerful. Even in foreign affairs, the State Department is—realistically speaking—a junior partner." Rickover noted that the State Department in its own area of responsibility—foreign affairs—received for research only a small fraction of the funds possessed by DOD. When discussing the "Witchcraft in the Congo" study