NEWS IN BRIEF

• **NIH SCIENTISTS CHALLENGE HEW ON CENSORSHIP**: Scientists at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) sought court action last week to contest HEW's refusal to allow government employees to hold antiwar meetings, including a speech by child care specialist Benjamin Spock, at NIH and HEW facilities on Vietnam Moratorium day, 15 October. The American Civil Liberties Union, which handled the case, filed a court appeal seeking the injunction against HEW. The court ruled against the HEW ban prohibiting Spock from speaking at NIH during the lunch hour. The court refused, however, to set aside an HEW regulation barring Spock from speaking at an HEW auditorium downtown during working hours. HEW has lost two censorship cases during the last year. One involved HEW's refusal to allow Michael Tigar to speak at HEW on the draft; the other involved an HEW attempt to bar the distribution of welfare rights leaflets on HEW grounds. Some NIH employees complain that HEW's policy on political speakers is unfair and inconsistent. They point out that in the past the department has allowed HEW employees to hear such political speakers as former assistant Secretary of State William Bundy, Selective Service Director Lewis B. Hershey, and Senator Strom Thurmond (R–S.C.).

• **STUDENT LOAN BILL PASSED**: Congress has finally agreed on a compromise bill that will increase the availability of bank loans to college students who are now finding it difficult to obtain college loans because of high interest rates. The bill provides an incentive allowance to banks equal to 3 percent interest in addition to the interest of up to 7 percent guaranteed under the 1965 higher education act. The legislation was passed because the prime interest rate has risen to 8.5 percent, which has had the effect of reducing the total volume of student loans available.

• **MARINE SCIENCES RESEARCH**: The Nixon Administration has proposed a marine sciences research program which includes the establishment of coastal laboratories, a pilot technological study of lake pollution to guide restoration of the Great Lakes and an intensification of Arctic environmental research. Several of these recommendations were originally made by the Marine Sciences Commmission (*Science*, 17 January). The Commission, however, recommended that an additional average expenditure of $800 million annually be made on new marine sciences efforts during the next decade; the Nixon Administration's plan would initially cost only $30 million annually and total about $200 million during the next 5 years.

• **ARCHES OF SCIENCE AWARD**: Gerard Piel, editor of the monthly *Scientific American*, has been named the fifth recipient of the Arches of Science Award "for outstanding contributions to the public understanding of the meaning of science." The award, which includes a $25,000 prize and a gold medal, is sponsored by Pacific Northwest business and industry and is administered by a nonprofit corporation, the Pacific Science Center Foundation of Seattle.

• **NIXON CREATES SCIENCE TASK FORCE**: President Nixon announced on 6 October the creation of a task force on science policy which "will review the federal government's present science policy and make recommendations as to its future scope and direction." The task force is chaired by Dr. Ruben F. Mettler, executive vice president of TRW, Inc., in Redondo Beach, California. Among its 11 other members are Dr. Philip Handler, president of the National Academy of Sciences, and Dr. Alvin M. Weinberg, who is director of Oak Ridge National Laboratory.

• **POLIO VACCINATIONS**: Public Health Service (PHS) officials at the U.S. Communicable Disease Center in Atlanta, Ga., are concerned that there could be an outbreak of polio in the near future among preschool children in poor urban areas. PHS officials estimate that 11 percent of these preschool children are without vaccination and that 25 to 30 percent are incompletely vaccinated. Only 11 cases of paralytic polio had been reported as of September 1969, but officials fear that if the current percentage of unvaccinated children is allowed to increase over a period of several years, outbreaks of polio could greatly increase.

explicit responsibility for supporting basic research, has never been able to provide more than about 12 percent of the federal government's support of basic research and about 17 percent of the government's support of academic science. In recent years the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the Department of Health Education and Welfare (HEW), the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) and the Department of Defense (DOD) have spent more on basic research than NSF has.

This is not to say that NSF has played a negligible role in promoting the health and welfare of American science. Lee A. DuBridge, President Nixon's science adviser, told a Congressional committee in July that NSF has had "a brilliant record." He said the agency has been "a prime mainstay of our academic science effort," has "given support to many areas of science which did not come . . . within the purview of the mission agencies," has put "a great new effort behind the progress of graduate education in the sciences," and has "even contributed greatly to improving science education in the colleges and high schools."

But NSF, a relative midget among Washington's giant bureaucracies, has found it virtually impossible to assume the leadership role in American science that was part of its original mandate. In practice, NSF has tended to support talented investigators who either don't want support from a mission agency, or whose work is of little interest to a mission agency. As NSF's own budget presentation noted this year, "NSF has been regarded more and more as merely a 'balance wheel' or gap filler and it has become progressively more difficult to fulfill even this responsibility within the relatively small NSF budgets."

These budgets have actually shrunk in comparison with 5 years ago. In fiscal year 1965 NSF received appropriations of $420.4 million. The total subsequently climbed to the agency's all-time high of $495 million in fiscal 1968, but then fell back sharply to $400 million in fiscal 1969. And the outlook for fiscal 1970 is not appreciably better. The Nixon administration has requested appropriations of $500 million, but the House of Representatives has approved only $420 million, and while the Senate has yet to be heard from, it seems unlikely that NSF will get much of a boost this year.

Moreover, it must be understood that