

the prospect that an inundation of foreign-made goods, once measurement restrictions on trade have been eliminated, will put Americans out of work.

The other group concerned about

metrication is the small businessmen, represented by the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB). The NFIB also worries about the import problem (although metric advocates

say the switchover will enhance the U.S. export position), and spokesmen say that costs of metrication will increase the concentration of big companies, who can afford to metricate them-

Briefing

House, Senate Differ on Solar Energy

A bill proposing a \$50 million, 5-year solar energy research and development program, whose architect is Representative Mike McCormack (D-Wash.), has become the focus of a tug-of-war between the House and the Senate over the nation's future in solar energy.

McCormack's bill swept through the House in mid-February by a vote of 253 to 2, with token opposition from the Administration. Under it, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) would manage the development of sample solar heating and cooling equipment; the National Bureau of Standards would certify it for the building industry; and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Defense would see to it that 4000 units are built, installed, and used in private and federally owned buildings, respectively. By certain target dates, the government would install free units in houses in communities around the country. "We want to see if land values go up around solar-heated houses; we want to know if kids throw rocks at the roof panels," explained one source. The House staffers involved in the bill argue that the public is ready for such demonstration units. They note that they have received more than 100 letters from homeowners, land developers, and builders offering themselves as guinea pigs in a future solar program.

The Senate, however, is equally anxious to show initiative on solar energy; its Committee on Aeronautical and Space Sciences gave speedy consideration to the House bill, but reported out a rather different version in mid-March. The committee version is more tentative about the readiness of solar energy for public consumption. It authorizes only \$10 million for 1 year; it divides responsibility for the work between NASA and HUD; and instead of furnishing the units to private homes, it provides that HUD would pay

for the experimental houses itself. Finally, to cover its bets, the aeronautical committee referred its version to no less than four other Senate committees. Ostensibly the Senate version represents a better deal for scientists, since it emphasizes prototype development and generous federally funded testing. But it also puts less stress on generating a product the public can buy.

So the Congress faces an interesting chance to do something more about the energy crisis than lowering the speed limit and tinkering with daylight saving time. Since it is likely to approve some portion of the Administration's proposed \$204 million solar energy research plan, Congress can choose whether, in addition, solar energy technology is far enough along to justify public use by 1979 or whether it should stay in a research and development stage.—D.S.

Academy Sued on Closed Meetings

Within the next 6 weeks, the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) will have to explain to the U.S. District Court of the District of Columbia why it should not open the meetings of the 400 to 500 committees of its operating arm, the National Research Council (NRC), to the public. The NRC is being challenged in a suit filed on 15 March by the Public Interest Campaign on the grounds that its committees are covered under the provisions of the 1972 Federal Advisory Committee Act which opens government advisory committee deliberations to public scrutiny.

Specifically, the suit seeks access to the deliberations and records of the Committee on Motor Vehicle Emissions, whose work is relevant to the subject of the Public Interest Campaign's newsletter, *Clean Air*. The suit argues that the newsletter is materially harmed by lack of access to the committee's information. It cites a 1971 petition by a group of 32 science writers to open NAS business meetings, which

was partially successful, and letters from activist Julia T. Apter and from Ralph Nader associate Ronald L. Plesser questioning the academy's claimed exemption from the advisory committee act.

The suit reopens the issue of the academy's accountability to the public, which has a long and convoluted history. Academy spokesmen have in the past maintained that, although 80 percent of their work is done on contract with the federal government, they are not a government agency and hence not subject to laws such as the advisory committee act. Instead, spokesmen have said, the academy is like any other not-for-profit institution doing contract work for the government; its private status enables it to be "both a servant and critic" of Uncle Sam. As such, the academy is accountable to its membership only, according to this argument.

The question of which identity is the right one is a matter of dispute. Abraham Lincoln founded the academy by federal charter in 1863. A 1956 presidential executive directive "ordered" the academy council to have formal links with government agencies, which NAS now has. On the other hand, under the advisory committee act, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) makes periodic reviews of its application in government agencies. So far OMB has not interpreted the act to include NAS.

Academy spokesmen have argued that if it were included under the advisory act's provisions, OMB would have the authority to regulate its committee appointments, fees, timetables, and maybe even its reports—thus jeopardizing NAS's independence.

But the brief filed in the District Court notes that, under the present system, one academy officer, in denying the public interest group some information, was able to fall back on an obscure rule: "Access . . . shall not be permitted until after the lapse of a 50-year period from the date of the requested material." Whether or not the lawsuit succeeds, it at least renews pressure on NAS to open up.—D.S.