"Astronauts' Doctor" Leaves NASA

Charles A. Berry, director of life sciences at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and known as the "astronauts' doctor" for more than a decade, is leaving NASA to become president of the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston.

As an Air Force flight surgeon, Berry participated in the medical evaluations leading to the selection of the original seven Mercury astronauts in 1958. He came to NASA in 1963 as chief of the medical operations office at what is now the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center.

At NASA, Berry, 50, monitored and later supervised the monitoring of the conditions and responses of astronauts to space flight in the Mercury, Gemini, Apollo, and Skylab programs. He was responsible for developing experimental programs to determine the effects of long-term space flight on man, particularly of a weightless environment.

Appointed director of life sciences in 1971, Berry had overall responsibility for coordinating and managing all biomedical research, bioenvironmental systems, aeronautical life sciences, bioengineering, planetary biology and quarantine programs, ecological applications, medical engineering applications, and applications for medical and health care delivery.

In his new position, Berry will supervise the administration of seven of the university's health-oriented schools and services on the Houston campus.—SCHERRAINE MACK

ogy transfer from the government to the private sector—and Stever claims he has been successful in getting the principals, from Malcolm Currie, of the Pentagon, to James C. Fletcher, the Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, to attend. However, his aim of making FCST have "faster turnaround time" on specific assignments has been less successful, he says.

None of this activity has been particularly visible. The best-publicized activities so far have involved the energy crisis. When last fall's Arab oil embargo caused White House planners to rush to the R&D community in a manner reminiscent of the panic which followed Sputnik, the chairwoman of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), Dixy Lee Ray, won the choice assignment of drawing up a $10 billion research plan for national self-sufficiency in energy by 1980. Stever remained in the background; he was chairman of a blue-ribbon committee that reviewed Ray's plan, known as the White House Energy Research and Development Panel. The panel and the energy policy office also worked on the fiscal 1975 budget, which was in preparation when the fuel shortage occurred. Evidently, OEP's performance during those crisis-ridden months was promising enough for OMB to reward it with a budget raise from $2.5 million in fiscal 1974 to $4.5 million in fiscal 1975.

The other office in NSF is the non-energy-related STPO, which will consist of a group of 29 if all of its staff slots are filled, will support FCST and work on short-range projects such as dealing with the weather satellite conflict. There is also housecleaning: one report by the now-defunct President's Science Advisory Committee (PSAC), *Chemicals & Health*, which nearly died with PSAC, has been issued; one on youth was also issued. STPO will do in-house and contract research on such things as technological forecasting, social science studies, and science policy. STPO will work on materials; a subcommittee of the President's Domestic Council is also studying materials; the FCST is reviving a panel on the subject; and there are plans for a committee of experts to work with STPO on future materials problems. Finally, STPO, with OEP, worked with OMB in preparing the fiscal 1975 budget, which turned out to be something of a boom year for R & D.

Finally, it is fair to ask whether any successor is planned to PSAC, which, in its early years under Eisenhower, is said to have met frequently with the President himself. PSAC was just allowed to flicker out when the other White House science offices were dismantled; Stever now says it will be revived on an ad hoc basis. The White House energy panel of which he was chairman was the first example; the next will be the committee on materials now being planned; a third will be a committee on world food.

What do all these activities add up to? One former OST staffer reflected the views of some observers when he described the energy and science policy offices as "a sideshow in a whole circus of activities which doesn't have any impact anywhere." And he questioned whether these new offices in NSF would not be hamstrung by warring groups in the foundation. "How can NSF coordinate the science policy . . . of the government when it can't coordinate science policy in the National Science Foundation?" Indeed, the relations between these new offices and the existing work of NSF seems to be consuming a fair amount of staff time and official concern.

But by far the strongest critics of the new setup are some leaders in the scientific community who, in testimony, speeches, and articles, lament that science advice is in this holding pattern, and, with clocklike regularity, call for a White House Restoration. How strongly they feel they have lost power may be indicated when a National Academy of Sciences' committee, headed by Eisenhower's science assistant James R. Killian, reports this summer on alternative science advisory mechanisms.

But a number of officials close to the new advisory mechanism argue that the holding pattern isn't so bad. They noted that the idea that the White House science advisers were persons of power and authority was largely a myth in the first place. Noting the autonomy and rich resources of the new offices in NSF, they are optimistic that these offices could do some useful steering of science at the middle levels of government, where a lot of important technical decisions have always been made.

One official elaborated on this theme: "I don't think science policy statements are where it's at. It's the practice that counts; it is the decisions on science that are tied to the area the science is serving.

"Four Presidents have said they should shift priorities from military research to civilian research. But with all the policy pronouncements, they have done very little. What a defense contract officer does from day to day affects science more than all these policy pronouncements put together."

—DEBORAH SHAPLEY