

Ford Nominates Alabamian to HEW

Forrest David Mathews, the 39-year-old president of the University of Alabama, has been nominated by President Ford to succeed Caspar W. Weinberger as Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW). Weinberger recently resigned to return to California amid persistent rumors that he plans to run for office.

Mathews is regarded as a tough administrator who has done a lot to revitalize University of Alabama programs since he became president in 1969. He received his undergraduate degree in history and classical Greek at Alabama in 1958, and a master's degree in education there a year later. He has a doctorate in history from Columbia University.

Mathews seems to have a special concern over the delivery of health care, which may be among the reasons Ford nominated him to be HEW Secretary. The University of Alabama has a new College of Community Health Services in which Mathews has taken notable interest. Its purpose is to recruit and train a broad spectrum of health workers who can participate in innovative programs to deliver medical services to rural and other underserved areas.

Thus far, there is no reason to think Mathews' nomination will run into real opposition in the Senate, which must confirm him, unless Republicans balk because he is said to be a liberal Democrat.—B.J.C.

several other officials set up an informal Ad Hoc Interagency Futures Group 6 years ago. The group, which meets monthly, last year completed a 2-year exercise in formulating alternative federal budgets for the year 2000. This year they are doing a survey on "the future of governance." Using the Delphi technique,* they have already done a pilot study of two small groups—81 high-level bureaucrats and 100 preregistrants to the WFS meeting—who have been asked to rank the desirability, likelihood, and importance of specified developments in such diverse areas as space, bioethics, the political process, family life, and transportation. The group now seeks financial support so it can tap a sample of about 1200 high-ranking bureaucrats. It is hoped that the project will result in a published document useful to anyone interested in what such officials think about the future of government.

While the ad hoc group is an exercise in grass-roots futurism, several members of Congress are trying to get the futures bandwagon rolling into high visibility.

At a speech at the WFS meeting, Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) announced that he is drafting several pieces of related legislation. One would create a National Institute of Policy Analysis and Research, a "semi-autonomous think tank" that would supply the legislative and

executive branches of government with "independent, objective policy analysis with a focus on future trends and options." He also proposed "an experimental futures agency to serve as a national showcase for promising new technologies" and—the public participation part—a program for financing citizens' associations so they could intelligently address the heavy environmental and technological issues of the day.

On a much grander scale is a bill introduced in May by Senators Hubert Humphrey (D-Minn.) and Jacob Javits (R-N.Y.), entitled the Balanced Growth and Economic Planning Act of 1975. The bill would represent the first attempt at centralized national planning since the 1930's, and as such is guaranteed to cause quite a stir in the coming months. It would create an economic planning board in the Executive Office of the President whose task it would be to formulate a general long-range plan, to be reviewed every 2 years, to guide federal policy and supply local governments and private industry with information so they can make policies in accordance with national goals. The board, with the aid of an advisory committee made up of Cabinet members and other high officials, would establish criteria for monetary policy, maximum acceptable unemployment levels, desirable rates for housing starts, and so on. A complex machinery would be set up providing for all levels of government to pass judgment on the plan with the aid of public hearings. Sponsors of the bill have no illusions of its being passed in its present form—several days of hearings are planned monthly over

the next year. The chief purpose is to generate a national debate over where this country is going and what to do about it. Although adherence to the plan would be voluntary, the idea is that it would guide legislation relating to economics, science and technology, industry—that is, most legislation.

Futuristics is such an amorphous and ill-defined field that it is impossible to say where the action is in terms of its growth as a discipline. Everyone is hewing his way through uncharted wilderness, borrowing predictive and analytic tools from a variety of disciplines.

Modern futurism was spawned at the Rand Corporation after World War II. The first big question addressed, with analytic techniques developed for military use, was the probability of war. Early post-war futurism, which quickly spread to the Hudson Institute and Stanford Research Institute, among others, concentrated on heavily technological issues such as the future of arms control, weapons development, automation, space exploration, and scientific breakthroughs.

Futurist thinking is moving from high- to low-technology enterprises. In the retail business, for example, companies whose planning was based on short-term market surveys are now basing their strategies on long-term trends in life-styles, demographic shifts, and developments in the international marketplace.

Hindsight reveals where a little futurism could have saved a lot of trouble. A striking instance is the failure of American automobile companies to anticipate the demand for smaller, more efficient cars. They could not have foreseen the oil embargo, but if they had spent more time devising scenarios instead of tail fins, there surely would have been some account taken of rising fuel prices. A futurist might have helped them perceive rising imports of small foreign cars as a message rather than a temporary threat.

Theodore Gordon of The Futures Group in Glastonbury, Connecticut, points out that a broader vision on the part of the aerospace industry might have spared the country the phenomenon of 700 aerospace engineers answering one Los Angeles electric utility's advertisement for meter readers. The moon landing program, Gordon observes, is a splendid example of successful fulfillment of a long-term technological goal and dismal failure to anticipate the possible social dislocations created in its wake.

The message is coming through in many states and municipalities where public and private groups, uneasy about swift changes in their areas, have, over the past decade, set up commissions to assess the impact of

* The Delphi method, controversial and widely used, was developed at the Rand Corporation as a way to incorporate subjective judgments into prognostications. A Delphi usually involves the distribution of questionnaires. Answers are tabulated and included in subsequent duplicate questionnaires. The feedback element has the effect of narrowing the range of opinion, so that the results of the third go-around amount to what is regarded as a usable consensus.