Science Advisory Groups Gearing Up

When Jimmy Carter moves into the White House, he will find most of the new executive science advisory apparatus in place and performing according to its legislative mandate. The only thing missing will be the science adviser.

The new President's Committee on Science and Technology, which is to conduct a 2-year study of federal R & D, held its first substantive meeting last month under the direction of its chairman, Simon Ramo.

Also meeting for the first time was the newly created panel of local government officials, called the Intergovernmental Science, Engineering, and Technology Advisory Panel.* This group, chaired by soon-to-be ex-science adviser H. Guyford Stever and attended by members of the Federal Coordinating Council on Science and Technology, wants to figure out ways to better match federal R & D with the needs of local, state, and regional bodies.

The 16-member panel (which contains two Georgians) is composed of representatives from across the political spectrum, from urban and rural areas, and from all levels of government. It has two ex officio members—the science adviser and the head of the National Science Foundation (Richard C. Atkinson is acting director).

Discussions at the meeting were friendly and relaxed, but panel members lost no time in communicating their problems. Among these are: inadequate access to up-to-date information on research and new technologies; federal policies and regulations that stifle local innovation and flexibility; a dearth of research on and assessment of social programs; and the failure of the government to include local officials in the roots of policy-making on domestic R & D.

Two subgroups were organized, one on technology transfer, the other on institutional barriers to technology flow (such as outdated civil service practices). The full group plans to meet in Washington four times a year, with the next meeting set for February.

The Ramo group devoted most of its 16 December meeting to discussions of which way federal R & D, particularly energy, ought to be reorganized. In the morning, Representative Mike McCormack (D–Wash.) made a pitch for his baby, a mammoth new Department of Science, Technology, Energy, and Materials. In the afternoon the panelists heard retiring Representative Charles Mosher's (R–Ohio) critique of science on Capitol Hill, which he said suffered from the "fragmented, antiquated, divisive, overlapping" committee structure. "No effort to enhance the efficiency of the Executive Branch will be successful without corresponding changes on the Hill," he said.

Mosher also delivered an eloquent warning about the "profound, persistent strain of know-nothingism" that runs through a significant portion of the populace. The anti-intellectuals, he said, were getting more sophisticated and more activist—"I think they're on the march." He thought Congress would be seeing more activity comparable to the 2-year-long "concentrated attack" on the National Science Foundation.

In addition to Ramo, members of the committee are William O. Baker of Bell Laboratories (vice chairman); Indiana governor Otis R. Bowen; W. Glen Campbell of Stanford University's Hoover Institution; former science adviser Edward E. David of Gould, Inc.; Elizabeth H. Leduc of Brown University; Fritz J. Russ of Systems Research Laboratories, Inc.; Charles P. Slichter of the University of Illinois; Charles H. Townes of the University of California at Berkeley; W. Bradford Wiley of John Wiley and Sons, Inc.; and Caspar Weinberger of Bechtel Corp.—C.H.

*The members are: governors George Busbee of Georgia (appointed vice chairman of the panel), Hugh Carey of New York, Julian Carroll of Kentucky, and Richard Lamm of Colorado; mayors Kenneth Gibson of Newark, Margaret Hance of Phoenix, Charles Horn of Kettering, Ohio, William Hudnut of Indianapolis, and Ted Tedesco, San Jose city manager; state representatives Thomas Anderson of Michigan, Genevieve Atwood of Utah, and Thomas Jensen of Tennessee; county officials Stan Cowle of Hennepin County, Minnesota, and Francis Francois of Prince Georges County, Maryland; North Carolina state budget director Kenneth Howard; and Charles Howell, executive director of the Middle Georgia Planning and Development Commission.

lance system is geared to detect problems among the vaccinated—a thrust which may not have been offset by subsequent efforts to detect cases among the rest of the population.

Some neurologists put little faith in any of the numbers because of wide variations in the criteria used by various doctors to diagnose Guillain-Barré disease. "I think until you have some hard-nosed criteria these data don't really mean very much," commented Dale McFarlin, chief of the neuro-immunology branch of the National Institute of Neurological and Communicative Disorders and Stroke, at the 29 December meeting. But there was no agreement as to how refinement of the numbers might affect the risk estimate. Most scientists at the meeting suggested that the risk estimate would fall but at least one suggested it might rise.

Probably the most troubling data, in the eyes of many of the decision-makers, was an analysis of the time interval between vaccination and onset of Guillain-Barré disease. That analysis revealed relatively few cases in the week immediately after vaccination, a cluster of cases in the second and third weeks after vaccination, and relatively few cases thereafter. Some experts felt the cluster of cases might be a response to the vaccination—otherwise one would expect the cases to be more randomly distributed. Reuel A. Stallones, dean of public health at the University of Texas in Houston, found the conclusion "inescapable" that "something happened on the day of vaccination that is important." Sencer told *Science* that he shares that opinion. But other experts suggest that even these statistics might be skewed. Thus, the lack of cases in the week after vaccination might reflect the possibility that people on the verge of developing Guillain-Barré symptoms feel too sick to get vaccinated. And the decline of cases after the third week might be due to the short life of the immunization campaign—large numbers of people have not even been observed that long.

Many experts queried by *Science* seem to have a gut feeling that the investigation, when complete, will reveal at least a low order of statistical association between Guillain-Barré syndrome and vaccination. Some theorize that the shots may turn out to play a triggering role in causing or accelerating the onset of disease in susceptible individuals. But others speculate that the difference in attack rates among the vaccinated and unvaccinated may reflect differences in the composition of those two groups—the vaccinated population may contain a