

makes removal of all of the waste from the tanks quite difficult.

By the 1960's, what with the waste inventory still growing and the storage tanks proliferating and sometimes leaking, it was evident that something had to be done. And, as a matter of fact, an attractive waste management alternative was demonstrated in 1963 at the AEC's national laboratory at Idaho Falls, where high-level wastes from the reprocessing

of spent fuel from experimental and naval reactors had always been left in their acidic state and stored in corrosion-resistant stainless steel tanks. What the laboratory now did was to start running these wastes through a simple, relatively inexpensive high-temperature process to convert them to "calcine," a granular material somewhat like a fine sand. This calcining process, which has been used continuously ever since, reduces the to-

tal waste volume by a factor of 9 or 10 and changes the waste into material which the laboratory confidently believes can be incorporated into glass for permanent disposal. (Unless immobilized as a solid the wastes might eventually migrate.)

Although perhaps stuck with the large volume of neutralized wastes already in storage at Hanford and Savannah River, the AEC could have gone to stainless steel tanks and the calcining process for

Califano Praises NIH, Retains Fredrickson as Director

In one of his first appearances as new Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW), Joseph A. Califano, Jr., dropped by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) last week to sing the praises of biomedical research and start making good on a promise to "depoliticize" the institutes. Speaking before an overflow crowd of NIH scientists and other employees, Califano called NIH one of our "greatest national treasures" and then expansively added for good measure that he thinks it "one of the great treasures of the world." With that, he announced that he has asked Donald S. Fredrickson to stay on as NIH director, a position he has held since April 1975, when he was appointed by former President Gerald Ford.

Califano clearly brought a welcome message to NIH researchers, who rose to their feet and cheered Califano's announcement that Fredrickson would stay. Fredrickson, a Republican, is a popular director and the biomedical community nationally was plugging to have him remain on the job. His retention seemed likely when Califano declared, in response to a reporter's question during his first press conference on 26 January, that he would remove partisan politics from NIH. Nevertheless, the apprehensive were relieved when the decision to keep Fredrickson became official. The fact that Califano took the trouble to go out to NIH's campus in Bethesda, Maryland, to deliver the word in person was even more reassuring.

The Secretary told his audience that he had asked Fredrickson nothing about his political views and promised that, during the next 4 years, persons being considered for NIH advisory committees would not be asked about their political views either. "I hope you understand the meaning in the larger sense of asking Dr. Fredrickson to stay on," Califano said. He realistically noted that he

cannot protect NIH from all political pressures to conduct certain kinds of research or to emphasize ethical and social concerns, but he said firmly, "as far as partisan politics is concerned, it is out of NIH." Not only that, he added that his message comes also from President Jimmy Carter, who "understands your need for an apolitical environment in which to work." The crowd loved it, especially when he called basic research "critical to our society," and said, "It needs added resources and I'll try to get them for you."

In exchange for his support, Califano asked two things from NIH. First, a promise of "excellence" in research. Second, a commitment to advancing opportunities in science—by opening the doors to graduate schools—to women, minorities, and handicapped individuals. "I will not stand for the myth that excellence is inconsistent with opening the doors of our great research universities," he said and informed NIH'ers that he expects them to take the lead in providing equal opportunity.

Califano told the researchers things they have been waiting to hear for eight Republican years—that they are important, appreciated, special—and he did not leave anything out. In fact, his remarks sounded almost as if they could have been written by NIH's patron saint and former director James A. Shannon. To be sure, Cali-

fano's visit to NIH was just a political gesture, and NIH will have to fight as hard for its needs with the Administration and Congress as any other special group. But in politics, gestures can be important and Califano was telling the biomedical research community early in the game that he considers them worth the gesture.

When it was all over, about 20 minutes after it began, Fredrickson, who wanted more than anything to stay at NIH, thanked the Secretary for "an enormous message and one of great hope." Now, it's back to real life.—B.J.C.



Joseph A. Califano, Jr. (left) and Donald S. Fredrickson