

sibility is in President Carter's hands.

Another source of NBS's problems is the Commerce Department, which the Visiting Committee accuses of having a "laissez-faire attitude." This analysis is confirmed by Elsa Porter, the new Assistant Secretary for Administration at Commerce. The Commerce Department, like the NBS, has had a rapid succession of leaders. "For the past 8 years, no Secretary of Commerce came in with the idea that he would stay around and improve the situation," she says. There were five secretaries during that period, which resulted in "an absence of sustained leadership" and subsequent internal problems at Commerce.

The Department of Commerce is responsible for presenting to OMB the bureau's case for more funds. The OMB, however, has blundered in its relations with NBS and contributed to the problems, according to the Visiting Committee. For example, the committee says that Congress gave NBS the task of prescribing tests of energy use or energy efficiency of household products. Although OMB approved this project, it told NBS to obtain funds from the Federal Energy Administration (FEA). Then OMB took the money for this project away from FEA. Joyce Walker, Deputy Assistant Director for Economics and Government at OMB, says that OMB took money away from FEA because of congressional directives.

Another example cited by the Visiting Committee of how OMB exacerbated NBS's problems concerns the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act of 1976. Congress gave NBS a deadline of 2 years to develop guidelines for the specifications for materials recovered from wastes. But OMB has denied NBS any funds for this project. Walker explains, however, that NBS is to work with both the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of the Interior on this project. The OMB has denied funds to all three agencies until they come up with a plan that ensures that they will not duplicate each other's work.

Some observers say the source of these difficulties with OMB may be the channels through which the bureau's budget is reviewed. Most of the government's science and technology agencies have their budgets reviewed together by analysts familiar with scientific issues, many of whom were brought in by Hugh Loweth, Deputy Associate Director for Energy and Science. The NBS budget, on the other hand, is reviewed in the economics and general government area of OMB. The Visiting Committee states that "the people from OMB responsible

for oversight of NBS are nontechnical people and have little understanding of the relevance of this highly technical work." Ambler says circumspectly, "I would think that the most logical way to review the NBS budget would be to compare it to other science and technology budgets."

Administrators at OMB, however, say that it is neither possible nor necessarily desirable to have scientifically trained people review NBS's budget. Loweth points out that there is no single technical area that predominates in NBS's research, so it is not clear just what sort of scientists would be appropriate to review the bureau's budget. Moreover, NBS is a small agency compared to such agencies as the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, whose budget is reviewed by Loweth's technical staff, and it would be hard to justify bringing in technical people to review NBS's budget. Walker believes that it is entirely appropriate that OMB be peopled with generalists rather than specialists. Specialists, she says, may tend to be advocates of various programs and strong advocates are not necessarily desirable people to help divide up a limited amount of money.

Administrators Not Convinced

Administrators at OMB are not completely convinced that NBS's plight is so dire. Walker explains that, because NBS feels itself to be very important, it doesn't realize that the private sector could do some tasks equally well and that some tasks could be turned over to other agencies. Unfortunately, she says, OMB must give agencies less money than they could profitably use. The OMB wants to encourage NBS to monitor itself, to determine which of its programs could be dropped in order to make best use of limited funds.

Despite the current tales of woe of NBS, many observers have not given up hope that the situation may change. Even the Visiting Committee says that the bureau's decline is not irreversible and that good management and firm support for NBS at the Commerce Department can yet allow the bureau to regain its scientific reputation. Deslattes, reporting the scientists' view at NBS, says that there remains among the NBS staff a cadre with "deep reserves of intellect and culture within their disciplines." He concludes that changes in the way research at NBS is administered can renew the bureau's scientific vigor.

Administrators at NBS are pinning many of their hopes for change on Baruch, being encouraged by what they

say was an unprecedented visit to the bureau on 26 July. During that visit, Baruch invited NBS managers to help him decide on the future role of NBS as a scientific and technical resource. He seems to have favorably impressed NBS administrators and convinced them of his sincerity.

Although the Visiting Committee suggested that NBS declare a moratorium on new assignments not directly funded by Congress, Baruch believes the bureau cannot abrogate its responsibilities in the face of decreasing funds—a laudable goal but one that is difficult, at the very least, to achieve. He indicates that NBS must maintain its classical role of "technologist of last resort," but wants the price paid for reprogramming made clear. "Congress and the Executive are reasonable. They know you can't get something for nothing," he says.

Porter is also concerned about the decline of NBS and hopes the situation will change as the bureau becomes more visible at Commerce. She and her associates are now trying to link the various programs at Commerce together. They are setting up weekly meetings of key program managers, for example. As a result of this increased communication, she predicts that "other parts of Commerce will appreciate NBS in a much deeper way."

Still another hint that NBS may be rescued comes from increased interest in the bureau in Congress. Members of the Senate Commerce Committee staff say they cannot remember when hearings on NBS were last held. Now, the committee "has a real commitment to look at NBS" and considers the status of the bureau to be one of the most important issues to be dealt with. As evidence of this concern, the committee plans to hold hearings on NBS in the near future, but they cannot estimate when the hearings will take place or specify what the hearings will accomplish.

It is still too early to say whether any of these professed plans to rescue NBS will be successful. But the fact that the bureau is receiving increased attention is, in itself, evidence to optimists that its decline may yet be halted and even reversed.—GINA BARI KOLATA

Erratum: In the report by D. Pious and C. Soderland entitled "HLA Variants of cultured human lymphoid cells: Evidence for mutational origin and estimation of mutation rate," (19 August, p. 769), the gametic mutation rate for an H-2 gene in mice was printed as 5×10^{-1} per gene per generation. This should have read " 5×10^{-4} per gene per generation."

Erratum: In the article by R. A. Brink, J. W. Densmore and G. A. Hill (12 August, p. 625), C. W. Guillebaud is incorrectly listed as the author of reference 16; the name should appear at the beginning of reference 15.