residential customers will actually have to bear by virtue of the new rates has been set at a maximum of 10 percent.

The PSC is also trying to improve and speed up the process by which the state handles applications by the utilities to build new power plants. At present, a body known as the Siting Board, which was created under a 1972 law that expires at the end of 1978, requires the submission of detailed plans and environmental information for an alternative site as well as for its preferred site—and if a nuclear plant is proposed, the alternative facility must be coal-fired. The Siting Board first decides whether the proposed generating capacity is really needed, then whether the applicant's preferred project or the alternative should be approved. The fact that the Siting Board has acted on only one of the half-dozen or so applications filed during its 5½ years of existence has given rise to widespread criticism. Although not suggesting that the Siting Board be abolished, the PSC has proposed that the questions as to power requirements and alternative sites be settled largely through generic proceedings of statewide scope. (The PSC and the SEO are in sharp conflict as to how "determinative" a role the latter should have in assessing power needs.)

For instance, with respect to alternative sites, the PSC already has taken steps to create a "site bank" to which utilities would look in selecting places to build the approximately 15 new steam-electric generating plants that are expected to be needed by the year 2000. The utilities have come up with a preliminary list of nearly 300 sites, and this number will be winnowed down to about 30 on the basis of criteria that probably will not be established until after extensive public hearings.

A fourth major actor in the field of energy policy besides the PSC and the two new energy agencies is the New York Legislature itself. The Home Insulation Act that emerged from the 1977 session is, as one SEO official describes it, "the very law that Congress did not have guts enough to pass." It requires the larger electric and gas utilities to conduct for a nominal fee home "energy audits" upon request and to ensure (as the lender of last resort) that homeowners can obtain, on favorable terms, loans for improvements such as attic and wall insulation and furnace efficiency modifications.

Briefing

World Food—the Next Presidential Commission

There has been talk for some years of the need for a national food and nutrition policy. Now President Carter, in response to a congressional resolution, has agreed to form a presidential Commission on Domestic and International Hunger and Malnutrition.

Congress has been distressed over what it calls the "continuing paradox" of the existence of surplus grain in some countries while 20 percent of the world population is malnourished. It wants to find out what effect American food and foreign aid policies have on the world food and nutrition picture. The commission, to be authorized for 2 years, is intended to spur the development of a national "food, hunger, and nutrition policy" unifying dozens of food-related and aid programs throughout the government. The commission is also supposed to look into the causes of world hunger.

The commission's mandate is more comprehensive than either of the two latest national forays into food policy—the 1969 White House nutrition conference, and the federal study of world food problems prepared for the 1974 World Food Conference in Rome. That study, says the House report, "did not fully consider the relationship between United States domestic food policy and world food problems." The commission is not expected to do any fact-finding or make specific programmatic recommendations; instead it is to bring together the available evidence and make broad policy recommendations.

Creation of the commission is consonant with the Administration's desire to broaden the meaning of its "human rights" concerns to include health, all under the label of "human needs." The White House is currently engaged in a major survey of the government agencies that have anything to do with international health, to see whether all U.S. programs can be organized to make the most of their potential for furthering the Administration's humanitarian foreign policy goals.

Sleeping Pill Study Under Way at IOM

It is said that at some time or other one-third of all Americans suffer from, or at least complain of, insomnia. As a result, some 27 million prescriptions a year are written for hypnotic drugs, many of them barbiturates. But taking a sleeping pill for insomnia is somewhat like kicking the Coke machine to make it work—the cure is crude, temporary, and its relation to the cause is obscure.

Last year, presidential health adviser Peter Bourne, head of the Office of Drug Abuse Policy (ODAP), stirred controversy when he expressed concern about the widespread use of barbiturates at a time when newer, safer hypnotics have become available, and suggested that the country might be better off if barbiturates were banned. Subsequently, ODAP and the National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA) contracted with the Institute of Medicine (IOM) for a year-long study of the medical use of barbiturates, a topic that IOM quickly arranged to have expanded to cover all hypnotic drugs.

Three classes of drugs are available for insomnia: barbiturates, bezodiazepines (namely, Dalmane), and "non-barbiturates" including methaqualone, which has enjoyed some notoriety as a drug of abuse. Dalmane, a relatively new product, accounts for 47 percent of all prescriptions; about 20 percent are for barbiturates, whose use has been declining with the increased use of Dalmane.

The overall use of hypnotics has gone down in the past 6 years because of the increased substitution of antidepressants, antipsychotics, and tranquilizers. But, according to a NIDA report, average prescription sizes for hypnotics are high—ranging from 36 to 59 pills apiece—despite the fact that almost all the drugs have been proved efficacious only for short-term administration.

What to do? At a public meeting convened last month by IOM the answer was unanimous: more research. "The lack of data becomes more and more overwhelming," complained IOM committee member William Dement, a Stanford University sleep researcher. "It seems as though we are where abdominal surgery

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In addition, the Legislature passed several other energy conservation measures, including bills to establish efficiency standards for air conditioners (the sale of inefficient units will be banned) and for hot water heaters. The Legislature also sought to ensure that the R & D work sponsored by NYSERDA will be directly responsive to the state energy plan by providing that this agency shall be headed by the SEO commissioner.

A bill to apply energy efficiency standards to all new building construction was passed, only to be vetoed by Governor Carey because the Senate and the Assembly had retained the right to override administrative revisions to construction codes. This measure, which is much stronger than the law Congress passed in 1976 with respect to building codes, is on the legislative agenda again this year and presumably will be modified to meet the governor's objections.

A number of other energy measures will also be coming up again or for the first time. Some of the priority items, as determined by the staff of the Legislative Commission on Energy Systems, are bills on solar zoning and solar access rights; district heating (with incentives for utilities that provide this service in which condenser cooling water from power plants would be used for space heating in homes and commercial buildings); and "truth in heating." As for the latter, anyone selling a new or used building would have to produce past fuel bills or other information about the building's heating requirements for the prospective buyer.

Some other proposals that may come up on this year's legislative agenda call for mandatory automobile engine tune-ups, increased generation of hydropower (perhaps with incentives for development of small-dam or "low head" hydro units), and policies to deal with potential conflicts between utilities and private companies and individuals who produce electricity by "soft technologies" such as solar, wind, and low-head hydro.

Although New York is clearly making headway in developing a substantial, many-faceted state energy program, it is uncertain whether the still unseen state energy plan will have a truly binding or determinative effect on the policies of the PSC and all other state agencies. If this does not come to pass, and it may not, the SEO—which, with a budget of

Briefing

was 1000 years ago—treating symptoms instead of disease entities." The problem, as Ismet Karacan of Baylor College of Medicine sees it, is that we are treating a complex of disorders of unknown etiology with drugs whose action, particularly over the long term, is also unknown.

The picture is complicated by dissension in the world of sleep research. There are basically two camps. One, represented by researcher Dement, emphasizes that the sleeping physiology is totally different from the waking physiology. Several physiological causes of insomnia have been identified—sleep apnea (cessation of breathing), nocturnal myoclonus (leg twitching), and disruption of body rhythms—but Dement believes that further research will reveal that other processes occurring only in sleep cause a substantial proportion of now-mysterious cases of insomnia. Dement also claims to find no convincing evidence that psychological problems are a significant cause of insomnia.

In total opposition to this view stands Anthony Kales, a psychiatrist apparently very much in the minority, who does sleep research at Hershey Medical Center in Pennsylvania. Kales contends that the vast majority of cases of insomnia are "secondary to psychologic disturbances," and (according to an assistant), "there is no such thing as primary insomnia of unknown etiology." Kales has encountered far fewer cases of apnea and myoclonus than has Dement (who says the two disorders account for 20 percent of insomniacs' troubles) and says that many people with those disorders have no problem sleeping.

At present, all the sleep researchers agree that hypnotics are overprescribed and more needs to be known about comparative psychological and physiological effects. But sleep research itself is still in its infancy, and it will probably be a long time before clinicians are in broad agreement on whether sleep disorders are a complex of problems unto themselves, or whether the chronic insomniac should be packed off to a psychiatrist. For now, IOM has taken no stand on further restrictions on barbiturates.

House Population Committee on the Move

The newly formed House Select Committee on Population held 3 days of hearings in early February, the first of five sets of hearings planned through May.

The committee was created last December, largely through the efforts of Representative James Scheuer (D–N.Y.), who is now its chairman. Both Scheuer and ranking minority member John N. Erlenborn (R–Ill.) served on the Commission for Population Growth and the American Future, which issued its report in 1972.

The new committee will include international as well as domestic issues in its deliberations; the differing demographic patterns of the developed and developing world will be examined, and U.S. aid policies will be scrutinized to see how they affect world population trends.

The committee has a sizable staff—37, counting volunteers—and is headed by Ford Foundation demographer Michael Teitelbaum, who has just returned from teaching at Oxford University.

At the first set of hearings, witnesses hashed over the old issue of the extent to which population reduction is possible without, or dependent upon, development. The most pessimistic witness was sociologist Kingsley Davis of the University of Southern California, who said we have had "little or no success" in population reduction because we continue to fail to build family planning incentives into all development programs. But George J. Stolnitz, population and development officer at the United Nations, sounded optimistic, pointing to advances in education, women's rights, and lowered mortality rates, all of which are correlated with a lowered birthrate.

The matter of abortion was raised but promptly nipped in the bud by Scheuer, who said "we ought to concentrate on what's easily doable with a minimum of controversy." The topic may be difficult to avoid, though, when the committee gets around to discussing pregnancy among American teenagers.

The next four hearings will address fertility and contraception in America, immigration and migration, population and development, and consequences of the changing size and structure of the U.S. population.

Constance Holden