Carter Versus Advisory Panels

"Before I became President I realized and was warned that dealing with the federal bureaucracy would be one of the worst problems I would have to face," President Carter recently told a news conference. After more than a year of jousting, Carter added, "It has been even worse than I had anticipated."

Apparently, the observation is especially warranted with regard to his efforts to cut the size and cost of federal advisory committees, the centerpiece of Carter's government reforms thus far (*Science*, 2 December 1977). According to the President's annual report on the advisory committees, released several weeks ago, the cost of the committees over the last year increased substantially even though the number of people serving on them declined. In the Department of Defense, for example, the committees managed to run up a bill for 1977 that is 18 percent higher than the bill for 1976, despite a drop in committee membership of 15 percent. Overall, the membership dropped 10 percent, but the costs rose by nearly the same percentage.

Government experts are at something of a loss to explain the phenomenon, except to suggest that some of the 299 committees that were abolished did not shut down early enough last year to have a budgetary impact, and that the 15 new committees established during the year spent more than their predecessors. Some success was achieved: the magnitude of the cost increase was less than the rate in 1976 of 15 percent, but this achievement is only a temporary advance. The advisory panel budgets for 1978 call for a whopping 17 percent increase.

Thus, the primary result of the reforms has been only a drop in the number of advisory panels or—to reach a bit—avoidance of even greater cost increases. This has been the case at the National Science Foundation (NSF), where the number of committees dropped considerably after several consolidations, but the overall membership was actually permitted to rise under the new committee charters.

Carter Orders NSF Plan Blocked

Recently, the NSF changes were given informal Administration approval, despite a flap over the membership totals that personally involved President Carter. The flap occurred when Carter read an account of the NSF consolidations in his periodical news summary and wrote a note in the margin directed to Hamilton Jordan, the President's top adviser, and to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The note is said to have read, "Prevent this, Jimmy." According to one Administration official, Carter was upset because the overall increase in NSF advisory panel membership appeared to be an evasion of his order that "the number of advisory committees will be sharply reduced, and that appropriate changes in membership will be made whenever necessary."

William Bonsteel, then the OMB official in charge of the advisory panel reforms, was asked to get an explanation from NSF. In the response, NSF director Richard Atkinson said that in some cases, committee memberships had been increased "to provide for stronger oversight and evaluation of the conduct of our programs." He noted, however, that the "number of advisors actually used to review research proposals and for all other purposes will nearly always be less than the charter limits and will vary considerably at different points in time."

Atkinson's response never made it back to the President, but sources at OMB and NSF said that the letter was forwarded up the line to James McIntyre, the director of OMB, and the NSF plans were informally approved. The net result is that the NSF has not had to carry out the instructions that Carter wrote on the margin of the news summary.

Asked to comment, an NSF spokesman, Tom Ubois, said that when the initial directive on advisory committees was sent by the President, "NSF noted the President's request and examined the words very closely at the time we made the consolidations." As for the directive in the news summary margin, "NSF never heard anything about it," Ubois said. "There was never any attempt to circumvent the President."—R. JEFFREY SMITH

mass systems, 3 each; and hydropower (including the output of existing large-scale hydro facilities), 5.

As the CEQ report points out, the recently issued two-volume interim report on *Distributed Energy Systems in California's Future* concludes that, from a purely technical standpoint, by the year 2025 it would be possible to meet nearly all of California's energy requirements from sustainable, renewable sources indigenous to the state. Again, these sources would include solar energy in all its forms, plus some geothermal energy.

This study, prepared under a Department of Energy contract by researchers from the University of California's Davis and Berkeley campuses and from the DOE's Livermore and Berkeley laboratories, assumed that California's population would nearly double by the year 2025, its gross state product would triple, and its energy prices would quadruple. A further assumption was that energy consumption would be restrained by the higher prices and improvements in energy efficiency, but that there would be no major change in life-style owing solely to conservation. The one significant shortfall in energy supply is a deficiency of about 0.6 quads in the liquid fuels needed for transportation—one that occurs despite use of electric vehicles for urban transportation and maximum production of liquid fuels from municipal and agricultural wastes and the biomass from plantations covering nearly 17 percent of all land in California.

Land Use Conflicts

The most severe problem identified in the California report has to do with potential land use conflicts. Such conflicts would arise in establishing the extensive biomass plantations (though none would be on irrigated farmland), finding sites for up to 35,000 large windmills, and attempting to locate solar collector fields for industrial electric and process heating systems (which, if located adjacent to the industries that they would serve, could take up 25 percent of all of the state's urban land).

The California study, which is continuing, was undertaken in response to the debate provoked by Amory Lovins of Friends of the Earth with his much publicized thesis that energy development should follow the "soft" path of decentralized, renewable sources, as opposed to the "hard" path represented by development of large-scale, centralized nuclear and coal-fired facilities. The new solar reports by CEQ and OTA will now no doubt lend further intensity to this still ongoing debate.—LUTHER J. CARTER

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