

gy Commission and the PUC talk to the utilities, the Department of Housing and Community Development and the Business and Transportation Agency's new "SolarCal" office talk to home builders, and so on.

The idea, according to the governor's energy advisers, is to make the promotion of solar and other alternative energy technologies the concern of all relevant agencies and to avoid the highly centralized, super-department approach followed in Washington. It is too early to say whether this diffuse effort will be a success, but that there can be advantages in having a number of more or less independent centers of initiative is obvious. With the passage of Proposition 13, plans for a state energy development authority were canceled, thus eliminating \$50 million in alternative technology projects, such as one to build 10 experimental windmills for electric power generation. "But because of its decentralized nature," says Wilson Clark, "the state energy program was not hurt too badly. If the same thing happened to the [federal] Department of Energy, it would be dead in the water."

Not everything in Brown's record on energy and resource management issues squares with his avowed commitment to frugality and limited government. One exception has been his support of multi-billion-dollar water projects while failing to confront California agricultural interests—who account for 85 percent of all water consumption—on the issue of water conservation. Under present water pricing policies, agricultural users receive massive subsidies that act as a disincentive to the adoption of farming and irrigation methods that conserve water. According to the California League of Conservation Voters, "the official Brown line seems to be that substantial water conservation in the agricultural sector is impossible."

If Brown is weak on water conservation, he is strong on conserving his political capital and this doubtless explains why he has avoided a clash with the agricultural interests of the central valley and southern California and the water districts and local governments allied with them.

Political expediency can be represented as a virtue, as Huey Johnson does in

saying of Brown, "His aim is to stay elected and allow the rest of us to do our thing." Yet on particularly difficult issues, of which the water issue is certainly one, only the governor may have prestige and influence enough to bring about major policy changes.

There have been signs that the Brown administration may move more forcefully on the water issue during the governor's next term. Conservationists took particular heart when Johnson, who had not been as active on the water problem as on other resource issues, dispatched a telegram urging the California congressional delegation to vote to sustain President Carter's veto of the water projects bill.

As the newly reelected governor of California, Brown is now in a position not only to decide state policy but to influence national policy in a number of important fields, with his opportunities being especially great in the fields of energy policy and resource management. Clearly, Brown already has made a difference, and the mark he leaves over the next 4 years could be very large indeed.—LUTHER J. CARTER

Universities "Battered" by Federal Regulators

Jerome B. Wiesner, the president of Massachusetts Institute of Technology and former science adviser to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, feels "like a battered child" because he believes the government is mistreating the big research universities. That was the message he gave the annual meeting of university research administrators on 9 November in Washington, D.C. Academia has done nothing to provoke the government's hostility, he claimed. Something else has happened to transform what was once the kindest sponsor of basic research into a cruel stepfather.

The government's change of heart has made it more tightfisted with research funds, Wiesner said, but that is only a small part of the problem. What really brought him to a boil was the government's intrusion into what he considers the privacy of his home turf—the internal management of the university. His complaints echoed those of his counterparts in private industry; several times

he referred to the latest federal regulations as "repressive." Wiesner told the gathered administrators that it was "wrong" for Congress to limit the amount of money a university might want to pay one of its professors. (Applause.) He said, "The federal government is putting its nose into parts of our life where it doesn't belong. This is bad for us and bad for the country." (Loud applause. Someone shouted, "Hear, hear!") The basic "federal-academic relationship . . . is floundering," Wiesner warned, because the government has dropped its "attitude of understanding, encouragement, and support" and adopted a hostile view which sees universities as "purveyors of products, to be held accountable by the standards of trade and commerce."

Wiesner's talk was dire, so much so that one person in the audience joined in the lament by suggesting that the universities should stop doing business with the government if the atmosphere does not

improve. This sounded like a threat to go on strike. The situation is not quite as bad as that. In fact, the furor seems to have been provoked by a rather mundane spat over money policy, rooted in a decision by the White House to tighten up the accounting rules that are used to monitor research contracts and grants. The universities and the government have quarreled sporadically over this issue for at least a decade. Now a major revision is about to be made, a change which federal officials see as necessary and benign, but which Wiesner views as the worst item in a series of recent insults directed at academics.

Wiesner ran down a list of federal actions he did not like: regulations putting limits on faculty salaries, costly new rules for laboratory animal care, the unpredictable and formula-ridden way in which grants are administered, and the random and "almost despotic" commands that come from Congress, such as the order that government-aided medical schools open their doors to students who were trained abroad. But the most important item on his list was the proposed revision of Office of Management and Budget (OMB) circular A-21.

Stripped of particulars, A-21 tells government agencies how to administer grants and guides accountants in deciding which kinds of university expenses

are allowable as the indirect cost of doing research and which are not. Light and heat bills are allowable, for example, but keeping a full-time public relations man is not. After a House appropriations subcommittee held hearings on this subject in 1977, the ranking Republican—Robert Michel (Illinois)—requested that something be done to tighten up on allowable research costs. He was upset by the fact that \$500 million to \$600 million of Health, Education, and Welfare's annual research budget (a little more than a quarter) pays for overhead.

To comply with this request, HEW drafted some new rules, which were shown to the universities, rewritten by OMB, and then proposed as a new accounting guideline last March. This guideline—A-21—is being rewritten once again because OMB has received more than 200 letters of comment from the universities suggesting changes. The final version should be in force "by the end of the year," according to the official in charge of writing it, John Lordan.

In his press conference, Wiesner said that the whole proposal ought to be "buried." In his formal address he put it more diplomatically, urging that issuance of the new rule be "deferred until such time as broad review . . . can be completed and full consideration given" to its deleterious effects. (The hundreds of comments received by the White House apparently are not sufficient evidence that broad review has taken place.) Wiesner said he has taken the issue up with his MIT colleague, Frank Press, who runs the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. But Press, Wiesner said, is part of a larger organization now, with broader concerns. Press, for his part, declined to tell *Science* what advice he has given OMB on this question. He did point out, however, that there is "strong congressional interest" in tightening up the accounting rules, and that the interest will persist. "Some of them," Press said, "think the universities should get no indirect allowance. That's crazy, of course."

In castigating A-21, Wiesner mentioned one specific flaw having to do with separate accounting procedures for teaching and research. To assure Congress that it is getting its money's worth, the government has decided that it cannot allow research funds to be used to support teaching. The OMB will require bookkeepers in the future to make a clear distinction between the two, sparing the government any teaching costs. "You can't," Wiesner said. One can make an arbitrary division, but one cannot alter the reality that students learn by



Jerome Wiesner

doing research, and that they help produce what the government buys.

Lordan, the man who is rewriting A-21, said it is perfectly reasonable to ask the universities to limit the amount of money they charge for graduate students' work according to the amount of research the students actually do for the government. "It's a bit myopic," Lordan said, "to think that the universities are unique in having to allocate the costs of a joint effort." The cost accounting field would not exist if this were not a common problem, he said. A student who spends half his time doing research, according to the OMB standards, should have only one-half of his cost to the university billed to the research contractor. Lordan was "quite surprised" by the tone of Wiesner's dissent.

In his speech to the university administrators, Wiesner claimed to be more alarmed by the poverty of understanding reflected in the government's plan than by the actual nuisance it would create. Implicit in the new regulation is the idea that universities are mere "vendors . . . essentially indistinguishable from industrial or commercial organizations." If the universities accommodate this new spirit, Wiesner said, they might cease to be the place where the risk-takers and innovators of science choose to work. The atmosphere may be soured by bureaucratic demands to punch time clocks.

Wiesner's vision of the university trodden down by bureaucrats was alarming, as it was meant to be. It was also persuasive. But, being a campaign speech of sorts, it left out much that was inconvenient to include. Wiesner's critical analysis, so lucid when describing the peevish obsessions of federal workers, hardly touched on the eccentricities of university bookkeepers. The latter have contributed something to the mess that Wiesner deplors.—ELIOT MARSHALL

Briefing

House Tells OTA to Put Itself in Order

After a 15-month review of the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA), the House Subcommittee on Science, Research, and Technology has given the oft-criticized agency a qualified vote of confidence. The subcommittee, in a report on 20 November, concludes that although OTA is now apparently headed in the right direction, OTA should place greater distance between itself and its governing board and advisory council. And in an apparent expression of support for Russell Petersen, the current OTA director, the subcommittee has decided to delay for at least 2 years any changes to OTA's authorizing legislation.

Although the performance of OTA has been reviewed before by its congressional overseers, this latest report provides the most comprehensive record of the agency's successes and failures to date.* Several volatile political issues surrounding the agency are gingerly approached, but the agency's record is thoroughly explored and the hard conclusions drawn.

The portrait that emerges is of an organization under the thumb of two nagging parents, the Technology Assessment Board, which is composed of 12 congressmen, and the Technology Assessment Advisory Council, which is composed mostly of eminent outside scientists. Each has overstepped its authority in ways unforeseen by Congress, the subcommittee concluded: the advisory council by becoming involved in policy decisions such as budget requests and personnel choices; and the assessment board by becoming involved in the agency's day-to-day operations. As subcommittee Chairman Olin Teague (D-Tex.) put it, "the Board's disposition has been to think and act on occasion as a joint committee rather than a board of directors" and to treat the OTA director and personnel as committee staff—a rather natural development considering that this is what most congressmen are accustomed to.

Although Petersen has already moved to distance OTA from its advisers, the

* Report prepared by the Subcommittee on Science, Research, and Technology, *Review of the Office of Technology Assessment and Its Organic Act* (Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1978).