

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).

subcommittee recommends additional steps known to be unpopular with Senator Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), chairman of the assessment board, and Jerome Wiesner, chairman of the advisory council: namely, that the position of chairman be rotated and that a policy of forced turnover (of congressional and scientific members) be implemented. Kennedy has testified he favors continuity over replacement, and Wiesner has declared his support for an expansion, not restriction, of advisory council responsibilities and ties to OTA.

The subcommittee, noting the results of a study that found most OTA reports were each used by only one to two congressmen, and two to three staff people, suggested better liaison between OTA and the committees that could use its services. The subcommittee also noted that to date only 60 percent of the congressional requests for technology assessment have been completed, a problem which it said could be solved through better budget management and a clarified definition of the agency's role to those seeking its assistance.

Fertility Groups Feud over Awards to Steptoe

The announcement by British gynecologist Patrick Steptoe of the birth of a so-called test tube baby has touched off a feud between American fertility associations that involves gold medals and a canceled dinner.

The feud developed when the Barren Foundation, a Chicago-based association for research and education on infertility, announced in October that it would award Steptoe a gold medal at its annual dinner on 15 November. But after a stormy board of directors meeting, the foundation changed its mind and announced the cancellation of both the award and the dinner. "Without the award, there is no reason for the dinner," a spokesman for the group said. "It's safe to refer to this as a big mess."

Richard Blandau, a researcher at the University of Washington and vice-president of the Barren Foundation's medical advisory board, rather huffily explained the reasons for the withdrawal of the award in the Chicago *Sun-Times*: "There

is great concern in the medical world about Dr. Steptoe's test tube baby. He has failed to publish a scientific report to explain fully what he did. [The brief note that appeared in *Nature* failed to provide any significant detail, he said.] And many of us, with far greater experience in the field, still aren't convinced that it was a test tube baby. For all we know so far, the baby could have been born by natural means. Further, Dr. Steptoe may have given false hope to millions of women because he has not revealed how many failures he had before this one birth. We know the figure is a considerable one." Other than in this statement, which expresses bluntly a concern raised previously in the United States (*Science*, 25 August), directors of the foundation made themselves unavailable to the press.

Two other associations proceeded to come vigorously to Steptoe's defense. One, the New York Fertility Research Foundation, announced that it would, as planned, award Steptoe its certificate of merit on 1 December. A member of the group, Wayne Decker, said that "Steptoe has discussed his recent work before several recognized scientific forums. There is no reason to question his claims or reasons for not completing his report for medical journals at this time." Steptoe had claimed that he was too swamped with phone calls and questions to complete the report.

A second group, the Birmingham (Alabama)-based American Fertility Society, was even more vehement. The president of the group, S. Jan Behrman, termed the Barren Foundation's charges a "slur on the reputation of a renowned and distinguished physician-scientist." The society is the American affiliate of the International Federation of Fertility Societies, of which Steptoe is the current president. "As to the comment . . . implying that Mrs. Brown could possibly have given birth to the baby by normal means, I can't imagine such a possibility with the absence of fallopian tubes which was the case of Mrs. Brown." Behrman added that "I have it upon sound authority that two more pregnancies have been achieved by in vitro fertilization and that the next baby is scheduled for delivery in February."

That is also the month when the society plans to hear from Steptoe at its annual dinner in San Francisco. According to Behrman, Steptoe has told the society that he will discuss his research and the procedures for in vitro fertilization then.

Carter Signs Bill to Control Angel Dust

Among the nine bills signed by President Carter on 10 November, at the last minute before the constitutional deadline which took effect after Congress recessed, was the Psychotropic Substances Act of 1978. Though the signing was accompanied by little fanfare—Carter made no statement about the bill and the proverbial pens were not handed out to onlooking congressional sponsors—drug enforcement authorities consider it to be a significant step forward in efforts to control the smuggling of psychotropic drugs between countries, and the proliferation of illicit trafficking in PCP (popularly known as angel dust), a dangerous hallucinogen that prompts bizarre and self-destructive effects in those who take it (*Science*, 30 June).

The first portion of the bill merely enables the United States to alter its drug laws to conform to those established for international trafficking under the Vienna Convention on Psychotropic Substances signed by the United States in 1971.

The second portion requires that anyone who purchases piperidine, a chemical precursor of phencyclidine, or PCP, must present positive identification, and that manufacturers must report all sales to the Drug Enforcement Administration, with exceptions made at the discretion of the Justice Department. Congressional testimony has indicated that piperidine was freely available to illicit users from chemical supply houses that commonly deal with universities and colleges. Proposals to include two other chemicals, ethyl amine and pyrrolidine, which are precursors of PCP analogs, in the reporting requirements were dropped because of chemical industry objections—but DEA has moved independently to restrict the access to the drugs in which they are used.

"I do not pretend that [this bill] will necessarily eliminate the epidemic of PCP abuse among our young people," says the principal sponsor of the bill, Senator Lloyd Bentsen (D-Tex.). "It should, however, make the drug harder to obtain, drive up prices, and reduce demand accordingly. It should also halt the proliferation of illegal PCP laboratories that are currently so widespread and so lucrative."

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