

Frank Press and Congress

The President's science adviser is told he should make an institution of himself

"Don't believe everything you hear about my not cooperating with Congress," Frank Press said, hoping to nip some bad publicity in the bud. Press, the director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), spoke with *Science* on 22 March, the day after he spent 2½ hours as the sole witness in hearings before the Senate subcommittee on science, technology, and space. Senators Adlai Stevenson III (D-Ill.), the chairman, and Harrison Schmitt (R-N.M.), the ranking Republican, asked Press to respond to the charge that he neglects to keep Congress and the public fully informed of the nation's science policy.

This criticism was made in two brief reports filed with the subcommittee, one written by the Congressional Research Service and the other by the American Society for Public Administration. The burden of the two papers is that OSTP is avoiding its congressionally mandated duties to set out its intentions in annual reports and a 5-year prospective outlook; that it is failing to solicit public and congressional advice in the manner Con-

gress intended; and that important institutional chores have been neglected while Press and his colleagues deal with daily crises.

In the hearing, Press dismissed this criticism as superficial. He asked, "What better way is there to institutionalize an office than making OSTP an office which the President himself takes seriously?" Later, Press said that he thought the demand for policy statements comes from "science policy buffs who would like to get a report a month to hand out to their classes." His position is that OSTP has more important things to do—an attitude that annoys congressional staffers.

Presidential advisers are not accountable to Congress, but Press finds himself in something akin to a Cabinet position in that he serves simultaneously as a confidential adviser to the President and as the director of a congressionally created office. As the director of OSTP, he must report to Congress, but as a presidential adviser, he dare not report too thoroughly. Press clearly views his confidential role as being by far the more

important one, and for this reason he does not jump through all the hoops that his overseers on Capitol Hill set out for him.

Press will celebrate his second anniversary in office on 29 April. He is also enjoying what he considers his greatest accomplishment since coming to Washington, his recent victory in the federal budget scramble for 1980, which ensured that basic research funding will not be affected by the cutbacks being made throughout the government. Because of Press's campaign, almost every agency has given Congress a proposed budget that will either keep constant or increase basic research funding. Press said that it was not difficult to win this concession, "once the issue had been brought to the President's attention." Carter immediately agreed. Press observed, "We had more problems with the agencies, getting them to rank basic research high on their ZBB lists," referring to the management gimmick (zero-based budgeting) that this Administration uses in setting priorities.

Press claimed several other accomplishments. One was the joint project

Carter Sends Congress a Science Message

President Carter's message on science and technology, an appeal for a "non-partisan investment" in basic research and high-risk demonstration projects, was delivered to Congress on 27 March, about a week later than originally planned. Complications in the Mideast negotiations caused the delay. Its stated purpose is to win congressional support for the Administration's view that the nation's prosperity will rise or fall with its investment in research, and that the federal government has a critical responsibility to provide that investment.

In a grandiloquent justification of this thesis, Carter's message states: "The health of our economy has been especially tied to science and technology; they have been key factors in generating growth, jobs, and productivity through innovation. Indeed most of the great undertakings we face today as a nation have a scientific or technological component." And that is why, the Adminis-

tration says, it has sought a 26 percent increase in basic research funding over the last 2 years.

For all the fanfare, the report contains little that is new or distinctive. Indeed, it does not propose a single legislative initiative. It serves instead as a global summary of projects already begun:

- The six domestic objectives include promoting industrial innovation and efficiency, bringing about a revolution in energy supply and use patterns, funding biomedical research and improving health medical research and improving health care (although the sums are not likely to increase as rapidly in this area as Congress would like), improving the scientific basis of federal regulation, maintaining American leadership in space exploration, and developing better methods for averting deaths from such natural disasters as floods and earthquakes.

- In international affairs, Carter will pursue cooperative schemes for geo-

physical, environmental, and energy research. Technological exchange programs will be used also as a means of improving relations with China, the Soviet Union, and the developing world, with particular emphasis in the next year on the proposed Institute for Scientific and Technological Cooperation. This revision of the foreign aid program has not yet been debated by Congress.

- In support of national defense, Carter states, he has proposed an average increase in funding for military research and development of 14 percent a year for the last 2 years. No specific new projects are mentioned.

- In the final category, Carter makes a number of general promises to improve relations between the universities and the government, to fund experimental projects involving industry people at universities, and to consult more often with state and local officials about their technological needs.—E.M.