Bureau of Oceans Struck by Fiscal Thunderbolt

State Department officials are still trying to discover what provoked the "bolt from the blue," as one of them called it, that struck the Bureau of Oceans, International Environmental, and Scientific Affairs (OES) on 9 May. On that day, a House appropriations subcommittee voted, in a closed session, to slash the OES fiscal 1980 budget in half, from $6 million to $3 million, and cut the number of staff positions from 140 to 77. The bill making the cut goes to the full appropriations committee and to the House floor in the middle of June.

The author of the amendment, Representative William Alexander (D–Ark.), was unavailable to discuss the vote, but an assistant, Dorothy Thomas, said that her boss believed that OES's performance had been generally poor, that the staff was "technically weak," and that it has "fairly consistently failed to take regard of the longterm technical implications of its actions." What specific failures does the congressman have in mind? Thomas said she wasn't sure because Alexander did not consult the staff, but wrote the amendment by himself. She thought he had in mind such things as the proposed fishing agreements with Canada and Latin America putting limits on the annual allowable fish catch. Both were negotiated by the OES. The treaties could work a hardship on some American fishermen, a point not fully appreciated in the bureaucracy, Thomas said.

It is not immediately apparent how the technical performance of OES will be improved by cutting its staff in half. Lacking a full explanation from Alexander, congressional aides and State Department staffers last month began to develop their own theories of what provoked the thunderbolt. One is that Alexander is using genteel highwayman's tactics to pressure the department into hiring his chosen candidate for the post of deputy assistant secretary in OES for oceans.

Another theory, offered by a State Department aide, is that Alexander is seeking the attention of bureaucrats and fellow congressmen who have not given sufficient heed to his advice in recent meetings. Some evidence suggests that Alexander is personally annoyed with Thomas Pickering, the new director of OES. The latter, a career diplomat who formerly served as ambassador to Jordan, is said to be highly competent but brusque. He has raised the efficiency and the morale of the office. Nevertheless, the first time he went to visit Alexander, he was kept waiting for half an hour and given only a 5-minute audience. Pickering has not spent much time courting the appropriations subcommittee members.

Staff assistants on the equivalent Senate subcommittee said they were unaware of any deficiencies in the OES, and that they had not yet learned the details of Alexander's case against the office. Like other observers, they said they expected the State Department would soon find out what is troubling the congressman, make amends, and have its budget restored.

BEIR Report on Radiation Hazards Comes Unglued

A few weeks after releasing its report on the hazards of low-level radiation, the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) found that the consensus was dissolving. The conclusions of the group studying the biological effects of ionizing radiation (the BEIR committee) were given out at a press conference on 2 May. The report combined the work of two subcommittees—one on genetic effects and another on somatic effects—under the direction of Edward Radford, an epidemiologist at the University of Pittsburgh, who also served as chairman of the somatic effects subcommittee. By the end of May, however, nine of Radford's 16 somatic experts had written to the NAS asking for revisions.

The split in the committee was evident at the news conference on 2 May, when Harald Rossi of Columbia and Edward Webster of the Massachusetts General Hospital gave reporters a dissenting statement which they said was endorsed by three or four of their colleagues (*Science*, 18 May). Rossi predicted that others would file dissents, and he was right. Although complaints have come to the NAS in various forms, the common theme is that chairman Radford's formula exaggerates the risk that low-level radiation may cause cancer.

Radford, who thought the majority was behind him, wrote that there is no low-dosage threshold below which radiation may be considered safe. As an earlier BEIR study in 1972 had done, Radford adopted a linear hypothesis of dose-response to estimate the hazards in a field where no clinical data are available. Radford thus assumed that the same proportional risks are present at low levels as at high levels of radiation. This finding—that even small doses are carcinogenic—could force the Environmental Protection Agency to adopt stricter health standards to protect people against radiation. Rossi believes this to be an alarmist approach. When there is no clinical evidence, he would prefer to assume that the risks of causing cancer are proportionally lower.

NAS spokesman Howard Lewis said the academy does not intend to publish a minority report, for "that's not the way we do business here." Instead, a new, six-member consultative committee will look into the question and attempt to include the dissenters' qualifying language in the text of the main report. The authors of this revision, who have been asked to finish their work by mid-June, are Webster, Gilbert Bebe of the National Cancer Institute, Michael Bender of the Brookhaven National Laboratory, A. Bertrand Brill of the Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, Jacob Fabrikant of the University of California at Berkeley, and Dade Moeller of the Harvard School of Public Health.

Hamburg Moves to Harvard

David Hamburg will end his first term as president of the Institute of Medicine (IOM) at the National Academy of Sciences in October of 1980, when he plans to leave. After negotiating for months with Stanford and Harvard, Hamburg recently accepted an offer from Harvard's president Derek Bok to become the director of a new program at the university. It will be called the division of health policy research and education and will bring together faculty from the schools of medicine, public health, business, and

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government to work on policy issues.

Daniel Tosteson, dean of the Harvard Medical School, said that Hamburg will have "multiple roles" at the university, holding professorships at the medical school, the Kennedy School of Government, and the School of Public Health. Hamburg's office will be independent, fitting into the organizational structure directly beneath the office of the president. It will not have a teaching staff or confer degrees, Tosteson said, but will serve "as a pan-university, intrafaculty center" for research on health policy.

Washington Breeds Candidates (for MIT)

Another sea change that looms ahead is the retirement of Jerome Wiesner, president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). He will leave office in June of 1980, and a search committee has been looking for his replacement since last December. Chatter about Wiesner's successor can be heard as far away as Washington, D.C.

One authoritative caller told *Science* last week that the job would be offered to Frank Press, the President's science adviser, a good friend of Wiesner's and a former chairman of MIT's department of earth sciences. A second, equally authoritative source said that, beyond a shadow of a doubt, the final candidate was John Deutch, the former chairman of MIT's chemistry department who now serves the Department of Energy (DOE) as director of research, acting assistant secretary for energy technology, and putative undersecretary of the department. The newspapers have been saying for 2 weeks that Deutch is about to be nominated undersecretary of DOE to replace the departing Dale Myers. No such appointment has been made, however.

No decision has been made at MIT either, according to Carl Mueller, chairman of the search committee and vice chairman of the Bankers Trust Company. Mueller said, "The gospel truth is that the job has not been offered to anybody. We truly have not gotten to that point yet." He said it was unlikely that any decision would be made before fall.

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partment of Agriculture to do what the Congress intended, and that is really to lead out in this field of nutritional research. I think there are a number of areas where the Department really needs to put on the gloves with the Budget Bureau and go to battle, go to the battlefront on these things that the Congress has indicated it would like to see happen." That same day, McGovern talked of Congress appropriating $21 million for a USDA nutrition center at Tufts University in Boston.

Big money has in some ways brought HEW and USDA into open conflict. But on another level, they don't speak. Tom Grumbly, an associate administrator with USDA, calls it a class issue. "To be harsh about it, NIH looks down on USDA in the same way that the big scientific institutions of this country look down upon the land-grant system. HEW and USDA may be just down the street from each other, but they are worlds apart when it comes to the kind of people who populate them and the values they bring to their jobs." Another observer calls it a standoff between dietitians and doctors. Aloof as they seem, the administrators at HEW nevertheless stoop to play the turf game at times. One sign of this is an amendment that was quietly slipped into the Public Health Service Act and enacted into law on 9 November 1978. It makes clear, lest there was any doubt, that HEW now has a special mandate to do human nutrition studies "with particular emphasis on the role of nutrition in the prevention and treatment of disease and on the maintenance and promotion of health."

Now that both HEW and USDA are in the game for keeps, some say that nutrition research should be more coordinated. They claim that the agencies are going to needlessly duplicate each other's research and in the process burn up millions of tax dollars. USDA, for instance, has just started a program on infant nutrition at the Baylor College of Medicine in Houston that overlaps some of the programs at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. Or take nutrition in the aged. The National Institute on Aging (NIA) has a 1979 nutrition research budget of $3.1 million. But USDA is coming up fast. It now has received $21 million from Congress to build a center at Tufts University in Boston that will study the nutritional needs of the elderly. Its operating budget for 1980 is $2 million.

In selling the idea to Congress, supporters of the Tuft's center cited the potential differences between the way that NIH does research and the way the new center would. At a Senate hearing in early 1978, for instance, Jean Mayer, nutritionist and president of Tufts, hit NIA's system of competitive grants, saying they do not lend themselves to "a continuous mission, such as a study of successful aging." He also claimed that this system discouraged young investigators, and that "it is difficult to assemble multidisciplinary teams in universities through this type of funding." Instead, using persuasion by association, he called for a mission-oriented program at Tufts, modeled on the Jet Propulsion Laboratory and the Argonne Laboratory. Congress was impressed. Soon it approved the requested $21 million for construction. Yet the picture Mayer painted was not complete. USDA policy-makers are in fact moving away from mission-oriented nutrition research, except, it seems, when they see an easy opportunity to pick up turf. They have now set up a $5 million competitive grants program for human nutrition projects, not unlike the grant system at NIH. Mayer also neglected to mention that NIA—and before NIA was founded, other institutes at NIH—runs a large clinical unit in Baltimore, where nutrition has been studied in more than 1000 persons for more than 20 years.

Repeating the same research is, to some, anything but a waste. "Critics feed on this dead horse about duplication of effort, forgetting in the first place that there isn't a scientific fact that has been established unless it has been duplicated by somebody independent of the original observer," says Richard Greulich, scientific director of NIA. "The abysmal ignorance we have of the nutritional needs of the elderly is of such a magnitude that, in my opinion, the more people who work on it the merrier—regardless of what bureaucratic unit they come from in the federal establishment."

That establishment, however, has an attraction for the issue of human nutrition that borders on obsession. The upshot is ludicrous. At last count, there were 14 congressional committees and 20 subcommittees looking into national nutritional needs—each group with a slightly different axe to grind. In 1977 alone, according to a recent article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, nearly half of the bills brought to the attention of Congress were related to food and nutrition. There are now 14 agencies under seven different departments involved in human nutrition research. Not unexpectedly, the thrust of several reports published last year—including ones by the Office of Science and