

Solar Programs on the Chopping Block Again

A year ago, federal support for solar energy was headed toward \$1 billion a year. Then along came the Reagan Administration. Now, the Department of Energy's solar programs will be lucky to get \$100 million in fiscal year (FY) 1983.

Under a budget plan drafted by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which is circulating on Capitol Hill, support for solar energy is scheduled to drop to \$79 million in FY 1983. When the Reagan Administration took over, solar programs were receiving more than \$500 million a year. Support for energy conservation is headed in the same direction: the OMB plan would reduce spending to \$30 million, a 90 percent reduction from the level that prevailed in the final year of the Carter Administration.

Nuclear power, in contrast, is not expected to share in the carnage. The budget for nuclear fission would rise to \$1.7 billion under OMB's plan. This would add up to an increase of more than \$500 million during the first 2 years of the Reagan Administration.

The OMB figures are the opening shots in negotiations over the FY 1983 budget, and they are certain to change. The direction, however, is clear, and it is likely to heighten unease in the Solar Energy Research Institute (SERI).

SERI's budget for FY 1981 slid from \$143 million under the Carter Administration's original proposals to \$103 million after Reagan's budget-cutters had finished with it. It is expected to plummet to about \$50 million in FY 1982. So far this year, 345 people have lost their jobs at SERI, including its former director, Denis Hayes.

This has cast a good deal of gloom over the place, and SERI's future has been far from certain. SERI is operated by the Midwest Research Institute under a contract with the Department of Energy, but the contract is due to expire in April next year and DOE has been dragging its feet in agreeing to an extension. This gave rise to suspicion that DOE was contemplating shutting the place down. Last week, however, DOE finally announced that it will extend the contract with the Midwest Research Institute until 30

June 1983, and said that it will seek competitive bids to operate SERI after that.

The contract renewal should add at least some temporary stability to SERI, but equally important for morale will be to find a permanent director for the institute. Hayes, an outspoken advocate for solar energy, was fired by the Midwest Research Institute in June but a search committee for a new director was not named until mid-September. The committee, which includes Arthur Bueche, chief of research at General Electric, and Betsy Ancker-Johnson, former assistant secretary for science and technology in the Department of Commerce, is looking for a candidate with experience in scientific research. It remains to be seen whether anybody of note will be interested in taking the job in view of the rapidly dwindling support for solar energy.—*Colin Norman*

Administration Set to Assist Hazardous Product Exports

If one is doing something bad, it is best not to advertise it. This simple lesson lies at the heart of a policy drafted by the Reagan Administration on the export of hazardous products from the United States to other nations. The policy, apparently nearing approval at the Departments of State and Commerce, would eliminate requirements that the United States notify other countries when they are about to receive a shipment of hazardous products that are barred for U.S. domestic use, thereby insulating such shipments from the embarrassing glare of public attention.

A draft of the policy dated 27 August declares that export notifications involving such hazardous products as chemicals and insecticides "have imposed a regulatory burden on industry and on the government for which little benefit can be identified." Notices of specific exports "may prejudicially direct attention to them." This attention places exporters at a competitive disadvantage and jeopardizes U.S. trade interests, the draft states.

Consequently, the Administration will seek appropriate changes in laws governing the export of toxic chemicals, unregistered pesticides, unap-

proved medical devices, and unapproved electrical products that emit hazardous amounts of radiation. Five other laws affecting exports of consumer products, flammable fabrics, meat, poultry, and biological agents do not need revision because they provide for notifications of other governments "without giving unnecessarily widespread publicity to any given export," the policy states.

At present, the Environmental Protection Agency notifies foreign governments of the first shipment each year of a particular unapproved toxic chemical, and thereafter spares exporting firms the embarrassment of identification with any one shipment. About 180 such notices were issued last year. But even this modest disclosure has been vigorously protested by the Chemical Manufacturers Association. Similarly, the National Agricultural Chemicals Association has tried to stymie a requirement that purchasers of pesticides banned or never approved in the United States sign a statement affirming their awareness of the U.S. action. About 200 such statements have been received by EPA so far this year. And the manufacturers of unapproved medical devices have objected to public notice of their 20 to 30 exports each month.

One of the reasons for their objections, according to the draft, is that specific export notices rarely influence other governments while requiring too much effort by the shipper. Lack of action by others "is not surprising since notices of specific exports do not provide sufficient information for evaluation, particularly in developing countries with limited scientific capability," the draft admits. S. Jacob Scherr, of the Natural Resources Defense Council says that other countries have indeed responded to the notices, but that when they have not it is only because too little—and not too much—information is supplied.

Language in the draft indicates that the Commerce Department and the State Department are partly at odds over how the export controls should be reformed. Officials at both agencies apparently agree that brief summaries of U.S. regulatory actions against hazardous substances should be distributed, but State Department officials want the summaries to go to individual governments and Commerce officials want them to go to an

intermediate forum such as the United Nations.

Reagan Administration officials have been tight-lipped about the policy. "It is unfortunate that this draft became known," says Mary Hoinkes, a deputy assistant secretary of State for environmental and health matters. "It has no business being discussed in the public because the process is not completed." Similarly, Bo Denysyk, the assistant secretary of Commerce for export administration, says that "it is unfair to the U.S. government and to the people to discuss something that has not been decided. I'm not going to comment on it, and neither is anyone on my staff." He said it would be several weeks before a final policy was approved and announced.

—**R. Jeffrey Smith**

Nader Group Sues to Have Drugs Reformulated

Public Citizen Inc., one arm of the Ralph Nader conglomerate, is suing the Food and Drug Administration in an attempt to get what it considers ineffective nonprescription drugs removed from the market. Rather than attacking specific brands, the organization is taking aim at claims made for certain ingredients. Victory would mean removal of hundreds of ingredients from the market and would compel massive reformulation of nonprescription drugs.

In the 300,000 over-the-counter products available, fewer than 1,000 ingredients are used. FDA studies obtained by Public Citizen through the Freedom of Information Act showed that there was no evidence of efficacy for 69 percent of the uses to which these ingredients are put, and evidence of safety was not available for 32 percent of them.

Public Citizen president Sidney M. Wolfe, in a letter to FDA commissioner Arthur Hayes, listed several examples of drugs that would have to be withdrawn or reformulated. They include such familiar preparations as Solarcaine, which contains phenol, said by Wolfe to be both unsafe and ineffective; Dristan (contains caffeine, allegedly ineffective); and Robitussin (contains guaifenesin, of unproven effectiveness).

The suit is based on the 1962 law which says drugs must be effective as well as safe in order to obtain FDA approval. Wolfe says his group has already sued over the issue and won, but FDA has not been complying. This time he says he expects the court to put the agency on a tight enforcement schedule.—**Constance Holden**

The Life and Times of an Academic Scientist

When is a researcher not a researcher? Most of the time, apparently.

Scientists and engineers on the faculty of graduate schools in the United States spend an average of only 16 hours a week on research, according to a survey by the National Science Foundation (NSF). The bulk of their workweek is taken up by such tasks as teaching, administration, sitting on faculty committees, and attending scientific meetings.

All of this must keep academic scientists pretty busy, for they put in relatively long hours. Life scientists reported the longest workweek, with 51 hours the norm, but researchers in most other disciplines averaged at least 48 hours a week on their professional activities.

In spite of this busy schedule, scientists and engineers spend 3 to 5 hours a week on activities that bring in some outside income. "Such supplementary income," says the NSF study, "may have become more important because of the declining purchasing power of academic salaries." Writing books and articles for compensation is the chief activity in this category, and consulting is the next most time-consuming occupation.

In general, the NSF survey found that the typical academic scientist or engineer spends about one-third of his or her time on research and related activities. Teaching, preparing for classes, grading papers, and so on, account for another one-third. Administration and public service consume one-fifth of the workweek. Earning supplementary income accounts for just under one-tenth, and professional activities, such as reading journals and attending workshops, take up about 8 percent.

Charles H. Dickens, the director of the study, says that the survey was undertaken to get a better idea of the size of the total research effort in the universities.—**Colin Norman**

TV Debate on Creationism

The Reverend Jerry Falwell, leader of the Moral Majority, is planning a "great debate" on evolution versus creationism, to be aired on prime-time television some time in the fall. The protagonists will be Duane Gish, who has a doctorate in biochemistry from the University of California at Berkeley and works for the Institute for Creation Research in San Diego, and Russell Doolittle, a protein chemist at the University of California in San Diego. The 50-minute debate, sponsored by Falwell's "Old Time Gospel Hour," will be taped on 13 October in Lynchburg, Virginia, home of the Moral Majority; Falwell will be the moderator. Cal Thomas of the Moral Majority says the show will be syndicated and aired on time purchased from local television stations around the country.

Doolittle said he consented to make the case for evolution on the show because he has debated Gish several times before and is familiar with his arguments. Doolittle says Gish is fond of invoking the second law of thermodynamics to prove that life began with a high degree of order, rather than from random events as the evolutionists say. Gish also argues that it is statistically impossible for proteins to have arrived at their present precise structures through evolution.

Doolittle said he would have declined the invitation to appear if he thought that would result in cancellation of the planned debate about which he still has "great misgivings." He has stipulated in his contract that the show cannot be edited and that people who write in requesting transcripts not be put on the Moral Majority's mailing list.

Creationists have been making headway in state legislatures in their drive to have creationism taught as an alternative scientific theory to evolution. So far, two states, Louisiana and Arkansas, have passed "equal time" laws. Georgia may do so in January.

—**Constance Holden**