EPA Planned to Alter Carter Policy on Cancer

Anne Gorsuch Burford departed official Washington months ago, but the memos she wrote as director of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) live on in an afterlife of their own. A particularly fascinating document turned up recently on Capitol Hill, where hundreds of EPA papers came to rest during last spring's congressional investigations. This one belongs to a series of papers entitled "EPA Emergent Issues Reports." Dated 29 April 1982, it is addressed to Craig Fuller, secretary to the Cabinet, and signed by Gorsuch.

Like others in the "emergent issues" series, it attempts to alert the White House to political troubles that may arise out of decisions made at EPA. It covers a score of topics. One of the most interesting—at least for science policy—is a short item at the end of a long section on pesticides. The note is important because it indicates unequivocally that the EPA under Gorsuch set out to relax the cancer prevention standards used by the Carter Administration. It shows that the EPA's top leader and her colleagues at the White House knew that cancer policy was being changed and that it was shifting in a direction that some would perceive as exposing the public to a greater risk.

Specifically, the memo discusses an item on page 8 headed "permethrin." This was a pesticide which had been under review for many years. Animal tests suggested that it was a carcinogen for mice but not a strong one. In the previous Administration, the EPA set strict, low-tolerance levels for residues of potential carcinogens in food, even in ambiguous cases like this. In the permethrin decision, however, the new EPA leaders changed course. They decided to allow higher residue levels, arguing that some experts had concluded that, regardless of the mouse data, permethrin did not look like a compound that would cause cancer in humans. Describing this for the White House, the Gorsuch memo says that the EPA "will soon (next month) be issuing tolerances for permethrin—an insecticide. Environmentalists will be critical because this action would not have occurred under Carter Administration Cancer policy—a policy this Administration is changing. Congressional attention likely."

Although brief, the note does indicate that the EPA's leaders went into the cancer controversy with their eyes open. They may not have been quite as unprepared for the ensuing storm as they made out in congressional testimony later on. However, they clearly were unprepared for the intensity of the storm.—**ELIOT MARSHALL**

California Universities Block Animal Rights Bill

A piece of California state legislation concerning the use of animals in research was scrapped last week, giving Stanford and the University of California a surprise victory over animal rights groups. "We routed them," said JoAnne Glissen, assistant director for legislative affairs at Stanford.

The legislation, introduced by Senate Pro Tem president David Roberti (D–Hollywood) would have banned the use for research of animals that came from pounds in California and other states. Although seven states have laws that ban the use of local animals, the California proposal, if passed, would have set a precedent in prohibiting the importation of pound animals for experimental use.

The legislation was expected to pass easily through committee and the state assembly. But at the last minute, before the committee was to take up the bill for discussion, Roberti pulled his bill, apparently because he lacked the votes to get it through.

Glissen credits the universities' success to a "new strategy." Researchers had been writing their legislators to protest the bill, but that did not seem to be working very well. As momentum for the bill picked up, the universities teamed up an unlikely pair to lobby for them—the renowned Stanford cardiovascular surgeon Norman Shumway and soap opera superstar Stuart Damon, better known as Dr. Alan Quartermaine of "General Hospital." Damon took a particular interest in biomedical research because he has a child with juvenile diabetes. The universities also recently held a press conference with two heart transplant patients who extolled the benefits of animal research.

By marching out a leading scientist, movie star, and patients, the universities put an old and effective lobbying technique to new use. Special interest groups commonly follow this pattern to push for particular biomedical research legislation. But its use to counter animal welfare legislation is novel. (Glissen knows the lobbying method well because, until recently, she was on the staff of the U.S. Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee.)

Glissen said that in addition to scientists, "we got people without white coats into the process. That made the difference." The schools may have to use the strategy again if Roberti reintroduces his legislation.

—**MARJORIE SUN**

NSF Urged to Support Academic Supercomputing

The National Science Foundation (NSF) has been urged to spend more than $500 million over the next 3 years to improve computing on university campuses. The recommendation was made in a report delivered to the National Science Board on 18 August by a working group consisting of NSF program managers.

The report recommended in particular that ten supercomputer centers be established for use by academic researchers, and that a substantial investment be made in local facilities for individuals or groups of scientists. The current state of computing in the universities is so poor, the working group said, that "even these investments would not provide computing facilities for academic researchers comparable to those at a typical national or industrial research laboratory."

The National Science Board, which had just adopted a statement of its own urging NSF to devote more resources to engineering, including improving computational facilities on campuses, was receptive. But the Office of Management and Budget will be harder to convince that expenditures of that magnitude—more than double currently planned outlays—are needed.—**COLIN NORMAN**