
Synfuels Corp. Backs Gas Projects, Loses a President

The Synthetic Fuels Corporation (SFC), which has been hammered by several recent investigations, took another blow on 27 April when its president and board member Victor M. Thompson, Jr., resigned under fire. Thompson joined the board in September 1981. He lasted as president (the second-ranked official after the chairman) only 2 months, having been elected in mid-February 1984. He filled the vacancy left by Victor A. Schroeder.

Schroeder resigned the presidency after a congressional investigation last summer, but remains on the board. Both Schroeder and Thompson are friends and business associates of SFC chairman Edward Noble, who also has been asked to resign by Representative John Dingell (D-Mich.), chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

Before he became the SFC's president, Thompson was president and chief executive officer of the Utica Bankshares Corp. of Tulsa, Oklahoma. The bank ran into financial trouble in 1982 because it had overinvested in vulnerable oil ventures. An SFC internal review in April found that Thompson violated the agency's ethical standards in failing to divulge to the SFC that his handling of Utica stock sales was under investigation by the Securities and Exchange Commission. In addition, Dingell has objected to the fact that Thompson negotiated the sale of bank stock with someone who at the same time had a synfuels project under review for possible financing by the SFC.

Thompson's departure leaves the SFC without a quorum to make funding decisions. Just the day before Thompson resigned, the SFC board took care of some important pending business: it approved a \$620-million price support agreement with Dow Chemical for a coal gasification project in Louisiana and a \$790-million price support plan for the Great Plains Coal Gasification Project in North Dakota. These decisions may now be called into question by Dingell.

Meanwhile, the White House has announced that the President will nominate Eric Reichl as a replace-

ment for Thompson. Reichl is a pioneer researcher and developer of coal liquefaction technologies, having worked in this field since the 1930's. He studied the German synthetic fuel plants for the Navy in the 1940's and in later years worked on process technologies for several oil companies, most recently for Conoco's coal development division. He is now a private consultant. The Administration is expected to ask the Senate to accelerate his confirmation hearing schedule.—**ELIOT MARSHALL**

Critics Reserve Judgment on China Nuclear Accord

President Reagan's announcement in Peking of a nuclear cooperation agreement with China means that negotiations dating back to 1981 have been successfully concluded. Depending on the terms of the agreement, the Administration could now face arduous negotiations in convincing Congress to accept the deal.

Approval of the agreement would open the way for American companies to compete to build 12 nuclear power plants in China worth some \$20 billion over the next 20 years. Skeptics in Congress have urged the Administration not to accept any deal with China that does not fully meet the requirements of the U.S. Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act (NNPA), which is designed to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. China until now has declined to sign the international Non-proliferation Treaty or to accept international safeguards on its nuclear facilities.

According to reports from Peking, an impasse in negotiations was broken by China's agreement not to carry out the enrichment or reprocessing of nuclear fuel from U.S.-built reactors or to store nuclear materials capable of use in nuclear weapons without U.S. consent. Press reports, however, quote U.S. officials as acknowledging that the language covering safeguards in the text is "fuzzy."

The agreement was initialed in Peking by American and Chinese officials on 30 April, but will not go into effect until accepted by the U.S. Congress as the NNPA requires. After a formal signing, scheduled to take

place in Washington in about a month, the agreement will be submitted to Congress which then has 60 legislative days to consider it. Sources on Capitol Hill say that the congressional reaction to the agreement cannot be gauged until the details of the agreement are known.—**JOHN WALSH**

NIH Rejects Modified Plan to Clone Shiga Toxin

Richard Krause, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, has turned down a recommendation by the Recombinant DNA Advisory Committee (RAC) that would have enabled a controversial experiment to be conducted under standard safety conditions. The experiment, proposed by Alison O'Brien and Randall Holmes of the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, involves the cloning of a Shiga-like toxin from *Escherichia coli*.

RAC originally approved the experiment under strict P4 containment. But in February it agreed by a vote of 9 to 5 with 4 abstentions to permit the researchers to drop the containment level to P2. Krause, following established precedent, rejected the recommendation because it did not reflect a clear consensus. The experiment drew protests at the February meeting from critics who claimed the research could have biological warfare implications (*Science*, 24 February, p. 799).

O'Brien and Holmes have recently submitted another proposal, to be considered at the next RAC meeting in June, that the experiments be started in a P4 facility and moved to lower containment if certain conditions are met.—**JEFFREY L. FOX**

KGB Moves in on Departing Refusenik

Three days before his scheduled departure for Israel, Soviet biologist David Goldfarb was raided by the KGB who confiscated his papers and bacteria collection and told him he was being investigated for trying to take national security material out of the country.

The turn of events has aroused considerable dismay and protests from scientists here and abroad. Goldfarb's son Alex, who teaches at Columbia University, got the news on 17 April and promptly set to work on a cable to the Soviet Academy of Sciences, which has been signed by 10 Nobel Prize-winning biologists from the United States and Europe. The cable alluded to "grave consequences" to scientific cooperation, and said "we urge you to consider the implications of similar restraints" on the flow of scientific materials to the U.S.S.R.

Alex Goldfarb says he suspects the KGB may have taken action as a muscle-flexing exercise to "strike back" at the Academy for its prominent role in arranging Goldfarb's departure (*Science*, 27 April, p. 371). He sees a hopeful sign in the fact that when his father called the visa office after the raid, he was told the visa was suspended until further notice but that it was still valid.

Goldfarb says pressure on the Soviet Academy could well bear fruit since several members, including president Anatoly Alexandrov and vice president Yuri Ovchinnikov, are on the Central Committee.—**CONSTANCE HOLDEN**

Court Settles Control of Hughes Institute

After 6 years of intense legal battling, control over the Howard Hughes Medical Institute has been settled. As a result, the institute stands to gain \$2 billion to \$4 billion in liquid assets, a fortune that could make it one of the biggest sources of medical research funds outside the federal government. The money would come from the sale of the institute's major asset, Hughes Aircraft Company, one of the nation's largest aerospace and military contractors. The amount of funds available for research will also hinge on the outcome of a dispute between the institute and the Internal Revenue Service.

On 26 April, a Delaware court diluted the power of F. William Gay, who had claimed himself sole trustee of the institute, and named seven additional trustees. The Delaware attorney general successfully challenged

Gay's contention, arguing that Howard Hughes had died without naming a trustee to succeed him.

To date, Hughes Institute has portioned out a sizable amount of money for biomedical research, but it is a pittance compared to the money that could become available. Hughes Aircraft sales last year totaled \$4.9 billion. If the new board decides the company should be sold and the money is reinvested in diversified assets, the institute could easily earn \$300 million annually, Delaware deputy attorney general Bartholomew Dalton estimates. In comparison, the annual budget of the National Institutes of Health is \$4.5 billion.

A decision by the board to change the institute's tax status could also add to the pool of money available for research. The Internal Revenue Service has argued that the institute should be designated a nonprofit foundation, which requires it to spend at least 5 percent of its assets on research. Gay has insisted that the institute is not subject to this tax category because it does not issue grants.

There is much speculation that Hughes Aircraft will probably be sold. Company chairman Allen Puckett has remarked that it is already preparing for divestiture. Gay, however, has said the sale of the company has never been seriously considered.

But Gay, who rose to power after serving as Hughes's chauffeur, is now only one voice in nine. He and seven other trustees were named after agreement was reached between the opposing parties in the lawsuit, the Delaware attorney general, and the institute. Under a formula set down in January by Delaware Chancellor Grover Brown, each party chose four nominees. A ninth trustee is to be chosen by the new board.

The trustees include William Lummis, who is a cousin of Hughes, the administrator of most of the Hughes estate, and Gay's chief critic in the way he managed the institute. The others are leaders in business, academia, and medical research. The institute's nominees, besides Gay, are Donald S. Fredrickson, former National Institutes of Health director; George W. Thorne, institute president and professor emeritus at Harvard Medical School; and Irving Shapiro, former chairman of E. I. duPont de Nemours and Company. The attorney general's

office actively sought out leaders among women and minorities to balance the composition of the board and nominated, in addition to Lummis, Helen Copley, president of Copley Industries, which owns the two major papers in San Diego and several other newspapers around the country; Hanna Gray, University of Chicago president; and James Gilliam, a black business leader who is a senior vice president and general counsel for Beneficial Corporation, a financial services company based in Wilmington, Delaware. The trustees are appointed to serve for life.

—**MARJORIE SUN**

Comings and Goings

National Science Foundation director Edward A. Knapp has named **Bassam Z. Shakhshiri** of the University of Wisconsin-Madison to be NSF assistant director for science and engineering education. Shakhshiri, a professor of chemistry and director of the Institute for Chemical Education at Madison, will head the foundation's reconstituted education program. Historically, the NSF education directorate was headed by one of four presidentially appointed assistant directors requiring Senate confirmation. NSF sources say that because the education program is in the throes of a rebuilding effort and the White House appointments process has been slow in churning out nominees, Knapp, after touching base with White House staff, NSF's congressional patrons, and the National Science Board, decided to add education to the three directorates currently headed by assistant directors who are not presidential appointees.

Former Defense Secretary **Harold Brown** is the new head of the Foreign Policy Institute, which is part of the Johns Hopkins School of International Studies in Washington. The institute is responsible for five of the graduate school's academic programs, publishes a journal, and sponsors conferences on foreign policy subjects. Pentagon chief during the Carter Administration and a former president of California Institute of Technology, Brown has been professor of national security studies at Hopkins since 1981.

—**JOHN WALSH**