House Committee Bars Plutonium Transfers

In spite of stiff opposition from the Department of Energy, the House Committee on Energy and Commerce has voted to prohibit the routine transfer of plutonium from civilian R&D programs to weapons production. The committee was persuaded that strict separation of civilian and military programs is needed to support U.S. nonproliferation objectives, and included the prohibition in a budget bill for the department.

The department fought the measure on the grounds that R&D plutonium will eventually be needed for the Reagan Administration's military buildup. In a letter to committee chairman John Dingell (D–Mich.), Secretary of Energy Donald Hodel warned that if Congress puts the material off limits for weapons fabrication, the department "would require additional billions of dollars" for increased plutonium production.

The committee bent to these concerns a little by permitting the department to transfer some plutonium currently in the civilian R&D program to military programs, on the grounds that the material was originally produced in defense reactors. But the bill would outlaw future transfers. The department was unhappy even with this compromise.

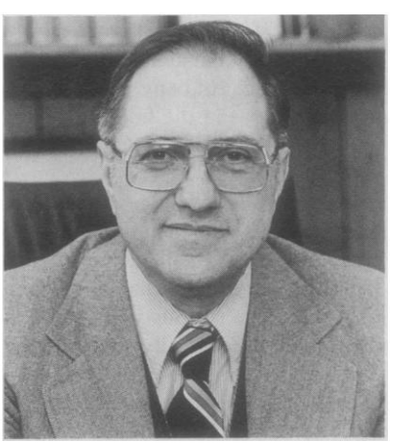
One bone of contention, apparently, is that the bill would make it illegal for the department to produce weapons from some 4 metric tons of plutonium imported from Britain in the 1960's. The material, which was exchanged for highly enriched uranium and tritium under a mutual defense agreement, is mostly being used in the breeder reactor program.

Although the British government has been given repeated assurances that the material is not being used for military purposes, Hodel says in his letter to Dingell that the mutual defense agreement "stipulates that the plutonium . . . is to be used for defense activities," and contends that it is simply on loan to the R&D program from the weapons program. "The loan of this plutonium during the past two decades has been with the understanding that, if required, it would be returned to its owners—Defense Programs," his letter states. Energy Department officials have privately told members of Congress that they did not want to relinquish the option of using the British plutonium for weapons (*Science*, 27 April, p. 365), but Hodel's letter is believed to be the first public statement of that position.

Supporters of the measure believe it has a good chance of being approved by the House, but prospects in the Senate are uncertain chiefly because no similar budget bill for the Energy Department is likely to be approved there this year. A provision outlawing plutonium transfers from civilian R&D to military programs may, however, be inserted in another bill currently before the Senate Appropriations Committee.—**COLIN NORMAN**

Medical School Dean Chosen to Head FDA

Frank E. Young, dean of the University of Rochester's School of Medicine and Dentistry, has been named commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and will assume his post on 15 July. The appointment of the 52-year-old microbiologist was announced on 9 May by Health and Human Services Secretary Margaret Heckler.



Frank E. Young

The appointment of a commissioner surprised many because the presidential elections are so close at hand. Since Arthur Hull Hayes, Jr., stepped down as commissioner in September to become dean of New York Medical College, the Administration had been scouting for a woman as a successor. At least two women are said to have turned down a job offer.

Young has both a medical degree from the University of the State of New York at Syracuse and a doctorate in microbiology from Western Reserve University, where he assumed his first faculty position in the early 1960's. In the late 1960's, he was a professor at Scripps Clinic and Research Fund at La Jolla and at the University of California at San Diego.

He has spent most of his career at the University of Rochester, however. In 1970, he joined the university as chairman of the microbiology department and, in 1979, became dean of the medical school. He is a member of the Institute of Medicine and has held various executive positions with the American Society for Microbiology. He was a member of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Recombinant DNA Advisory Committee from 1979 to 1980, a background that may prove to be helpful as FDA, other federal regulatory agencies, and the NIH committee sort out their roles in monitoring biotechnology products.

—**MARJORIE SUN**

A "Death Knell" for Acid Rain Bill in 1984

Legislation to control acid rain seems headed for oblivion this year as a result of a defeat in the House subcommittee on environment and health. The best hope for a compromise among competing interests died on 2 May when the subcommittee voted 10 to 9 to kill a proposal sponsored by the chairman, Representative Henry Waxman (D–Calif.). After the vote, Waxman described the decision as the "likely death knell" for legislation in this Congress.

The bill (H.R. 3400) aimed to reduce annual U.S. emissions of sulfur dioxide—a source of acid precipitation—by 10 million tons through 1993. The plan was to focus special attention on the top 50 polluting power plants and to require other polluters to cut emissions in a second phase of enforcement. The industrial Midwest will bear the greatest economic burden in any attempt to reduce SO_2 pollution. Recognizing this fact, H.R.