

Brown Loses Bid to Head Space Subcommittee

In a surprise move, Representative George Brown (D-Calif.) announced last month that he was stepping down as chairman of the House agriculture subcommittee on research in order to claim the chairmanship of a science and technology subcommittee dealing with space policy. The move was widely interpreted as an effort to secure a more influential position on issues involving military use of space, an area in which he has taken a keen interest. On 7 February, however, members of the Science and Technology Committee passed over Brown for the space subcommittee chairmanship and instead elected Representative Bill Nelson (D-Fla.) to the post. Brown is thus left without a chairmanship.

Nelson, whose district includes the Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral, is said to have campaigned hard for the post and gained support from many freshman members of the committee. He defeated Brown by a vote of 14 to 10. The chairmanship was open because Representative Harold Volkmer (D-Mo.), who headed the panel last year, has moved over to replace Albert Gore, Jr. (D-Tenn.), as chairman of the investigations and oversight subcommittee. Gore was elected to the Senate last year.

Brown, who has been influential in science policy matters for most of his two decades in Congress, is thus left without a major power base. Had he stayed in the agriculture subcommittee post, he would have been well placed to influence reforms in the nation's pesticide law, which is up for renewal this year. Had he gained the space subcommittee chairmanship, he would have been in a prime position to oversee the space station.

The agriculture subcommittee chairmanship vacated by Brown has gone to Representative Berkley Bedell (D-Iowa), who in the past has sided with Brown on many research and environmental issues.

One key committee concerned with science issues, the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, has not yet completed its reorganization. However, the chairman of the health subcommittee will continue to be Rep-

resentative Henry Waxman (D-Calif.). Representative Timothy Wirth (D-Colo.) will remain as chairman of the telecommunications subcommittee.



Representative Nelson

Defeated George Brown for the subcommittee chairmanship by a vote of 14 to 10.

Both those panels will have almost twice as many members as last year. The chairmanship of the subcommittee on energy conservation and power, which was vacated by Richard Ottinger, who retired from Congress last year, is expected to go to Representative Edward Markey (D-Mass.). Markey, like Ottinger, is expected to give a good deal of attention to nuclear proliferation.—COLIN NORMAN

Herrington Confirmed as Energy Secretary

In the parlance of one of his backers, John S. Herrington clearly brings a "fresh and unbiased perspective" to his new job as Secretary of Energy. Herrington, who was confirmed by a vote of 93-1 on 6 February, is an attorney who by his own admission has little or no experience in energy and nuclear weapons matters, the two principal concerns of his department.

Herrington comes to his new job from the White House, where he served as director of personnel and masterminded a reorganization that favorably impressed the President. At a recent hearing before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Com-

mittee, he indicated that his primary assignment is to determine whether his new department should be similarly reorganized, or perhaps dismantled, as Reagan has previously promised. "I have a totally open mind on this issue," he said.

Although Herrington insisted he will be a "full-time Secretary, not a caretaker" while this study is under way, he confessed that he will perform somewhat cold. "Are you familiar with our fusion energy program?" asked Senator Dale Bumpers (D-Ark.), his toughest interrogator. "Sir, I am not," Herrington said. "I am aware of the program, but I am far below the technical level to understand the difference between fusion and fission and various nuclear terms." What mixture of energy resources should the United States have by the year 2000? Bumpers asked. "I think that speculation is beyond the scope of my knowledge," Herrington said, promising that he would come back to the committee for answers after his confirmation.

Few of Herrington's remarks were commitments. His principal theme was that "we need to use energy wisely and we need strong and efficient energy-producing industries." He said that he favors completion of the nuclear power plants now under construction, the "reasonable" application of health and safety regulations, and an "activist" role for the government in the creation of alternative sources of energy over the long run. "I am a believer in conservation," he told the committee. Nuclear weapons production should remain under civilian control, and "technical-type scientific people" should not be subjected to political loyalty tests, he added.

Most committee members praised him effusively, despite their vehement opposition to any destruction of the department. Senator Pete Wilson (R-Calif.) said that Herrington, who has also been an assistant secretary of the navy for manpower and reserve affairs, was "superbly prepared"; Senator John Warner (R-Va.) said, "I am certain he will serve with excellence"; and Senator Bennett Johnston (D-La.) said that Herrington had "the background and . . . ought to have the skills to do this job very well."

The lone negative vote was cast by Senator William Proxmire (D-Wis.),

who cited Herrington's lack of experience. "My colleagues may well ask me, just how qualified should a nominee be to head this department? After all, previous secretaries include a dentist and a soft drink executive," Proxmire said. "Aside from [the previous secretary, Donald] Hodel, energy secretaries have all been grossly, pitifully unqualified for the job. John Herrington fits right into that miserable tradition."—**R. JEFFREY SMITH**

Germany Announces Plans for Reprocessing Plant

In a move that is expected to provide a new focal point for the activities of West Germany's powerful antinuclear movement, the German nuclear industry last week announced plans to build the country's first full-scale reprocessing plant for spent fuel from nuclear reactors.

The reprocessing plant will be built by DWK, a company which has been set up by Germany's privately owned electric utilities to take responsibility for the disposal of used nuclear fuel. It will be situated in the town of Wackersdorf, 45 miles to the east of Nuremberg and close to the border with Czechoslovakia.

The announcement came 10 days after the federal government in Bonn had agreed in principle to give the go-ahead to the construction of reprocessing facilities in West Germany, making it the third country in Western Europe—after France and Great Britain—to take such a step.

In contrast to the British and French plants, both of which carry out a substantial amount of reprocessing for foreign customers, the Germany facility will be relatively modest in size, with a plant capacity of 350 tonnes of spent fuel a year, little more than the current output of the country's 18 existing light water reactors.

Furthermore, DWK has emphasized that the reprocessing plant, estimated to cost between \$2 billion and \$3 billion, will on completion in 1993 bring some 2000 new jobs into an area that currently has an unemployment rate of 16 percent, well above the national average.

Despite these factors, antinuclear groups headed by members of West

Germany's environmentalist party, the Greens, have already announced that they intend to oppose the company's plans "by every legal means," and have planned a major protest demonstration to take place in Wackersdorf on 16 February.

The critics argue that at the industry's current prices, it is 40 percent more expensive to reprocess spent nuclear fuel than it is to leave it untreated in long-term storage. And they have also expressed concern that, in the light of the unattractive economics, one undeclared long-term goal of the government could be to provide itself with an independent source of plutonium that might eventually be used in the construction of nuclear weapons.

The government has strongly denied that it has any such plans, pointing out that under current international law, West Germany is forbidden from owning or producing nuclear weapons. Its main argument is that it wishes to avoid the heavy expenditures incurred in sending its nuclear wastes for reprocessing to the French facility at La Hague.

But Bonn officials also admit that the green light has been given to the new reprocessing facility as part of a general effort by the ruling Christian Democrats to stimulate the growth of Germany's nuclear industry, which has long been a target of the Greens and also came in for some strong criticism from the last government, headed by the Social Democrats.

It was followed by the announcement that one of the main items being discussed by German president Richard von Weizsacker, during a trip to Cairo last week, was how the Egyptian government might be encouraged to accept a bid from Germany's main nuclear plant constructor, Kraftwerk Union, a subsidiary of Siemens, for the building of a new reactor near Alexandria. The German government has already announced that it is prepared to provide substantial export credits to underwrite such a deal.

However, it appears to have accepted that, at least in the medium term, the domestic use of nuclear power is likely to expand considerably less rapidly than was thought in the early 1970's. That was the time at which plans were first laid out for a major expansion, including several centers, each containing a complete

spectrum of nuclear processing facilities, ranging from uranium enrichment to long-term storage.

As part of these plans, the government announced in 1977 that, based on geological tests, it had chosen the town of Gorleben in Lower Saxony to be one of the sites. However, these plans were suspended after a lengthy public inquiry in which the antinuclear movement played a decisive part, and has only recently been reissued in a scaled-down version.

All the current signs are that the Wackersdorf decision will prove to be no less controversial. The Greens, for example, are demanding that the area around the city be designated a natural park, and have already collected most of the 25,000 signatures necessary to organize a referendum on the plans for the reprocessing facility. However, the state of Bavaria is one of the strongholds of the conservative Christian Socialists that form part of the current coalition in Bonn, and the dispute between the two sides is likely to be intense.—**DAVID DICKSON**

Comings and Goings

The deputy directorship of the National Science Foundation, which has been vacant for 2 years, is about to be filled. **John Moore**, an economist who is currently associate director of the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace at Stanford University, has been chosen for the job. He is said to be undergoing a final security check before being formally nominated.

James Ebert, president of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, has been reelected to a 4-year term as vice president of the National Academy of Sciences. Four new Academy council members have also been elected. They are **Marian Koshland** (University of California at Berkeley), **Donald Osterbrock** (University of California at Santa Cruz), **Alexander Rich** (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), and **Carroll Williams** (Harvard University).

John M. Deutch, professor of chemistry at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has been named MIT provost. He will take over on 1 July from Francis M. Low, who is stepping down to return to teaching and research.