



James K. Asselstine finds the government's nuclear safety policy "pretty feeble."

stine was the most controversial member of the NRC. He was often the lone holdout in 4-to-1 NRC policy votes, and some of his dissenting remarks were sharply worded. This caught the attention of the press, but Asselstine claims that his role as maverick was thrust upon him, not cultivated. "The composition and the philosophy of the agency changed around me," he said recently. "The industry has adopted the philosophy that the NRC should defer to it, even when there are identified safety problems, and allow the industry to proceed on a voluntary basis. I think in the past couple of years, the NRC has been moving in that direction." Asselstine says he refused to go along with the tide. He believes the NRC should continue to be an aggressive regulator and push the industry to meet higher standards. Expressing this view, he claims, made him a loner at the NRC.

Others say that Asselstine became isolated also because he adopted a strict legal outlook, rather than a problem-solver's approach, in dealing with safety issues. One observer called him "puritanical" in his insistence on correct procedure.

Asselstine, in contrast, says it was he who sought out a consensus but found no one willing to come halfway. It was "my greatest disappointment in 5 years on the commission," he says, that he found no spirit of collegiality. Playing the insider's game and trying to reach an accommodation "only works if the others are willing to cooperate," Asselstine says. He found that other commissioners had "an attitude that we want to take a strong line, and we don't want to reach an accommodation."

The disagreement between Asselstine and the rest of the commission was obviously profound, involving not just procedural

questions but basic judgments of safety. Curiously, it was Asselstine, the nontechnical member of the commission, who often insisted on meticulous technical documentation of decisions, while others with technical training were content to go along with general statements of policy.

If Asselstine were in charge of the NRC now, he says, he would initiate three new programs. First, he would review nuclear utility management around the nation in a systematic fashion. He thinks that the worst accidents have come about as a result of poor maintenance or sloppy operations and that the NRC has a duty to remove complacency wherever it crops up. Few would disagree with this goal in principle. Second, he would undertake a broad review of all existing plants, focusing particularly on the oldest and most extensively modified ones, to see whether their designs are adequate by

present standards. Third, he would launch an "aggressive" program to determine whether equipment being installed on European reactors to mitigate a severe accident should be added to U.S. plants.

Asselstine does not think the present NRC is ready to undertake such projects, and he describes its safety program as "pretty feeble." But he predicts that congressional scrutiny of the agency will increase and that "ultimately all of these things I've outlined will be done."

It is easy to see why industry people will breathe a sigh of relief as Asselstine departs, despite their respect for his legal acumen. It is also easy to understand why they would be relieved by the departure of Commissioner Roberts. He has become a liability for the NRC and for the industry. But, for the present, Roberts is not about to yield. Nor is Congress. ■ **ELIOT MARSHALL**

Briefing:

Head of AIDS Panel Named

W. Eugene Mayberry of the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, has been appointed head of a presidential commission on AIDS. Mayberry, an endocrinologist, is described as a good leader and organizer. He has been an administrator at the Mayo Clinic since 1971 and has chaired its board of governors since 1976. Since receiving his medical degree from the University of Tennessee College of Medicine in 1953, Mayberry has published 35 scientific papers, most of which are about thyroid hormones.

In May, President Ronald Reagan an-

nounced the formation of an advisory AIDS commission, of which Mayberry is the first appointee. Since then, the incipient panel has drawn fire from researchers and interest groups because Gary Bauer of the White House domestic policy council has stated that it will not include any gay members.

An executive order, dated 25 June, identifies the functions of the Presidential Commission on the Human Immunodeficiency Virus Syndrome as advising the President and relevant cabinet secretaries on the public health dangers of AIDS and related conditions, including their medical, legal, ethical, social, and economic impact. The panel will also make recommendations to federal, state, and local officials about steps they can take to protect the public from AIDS, assist in finding a cure, and caring for patients. The commission will issue a preliminary report after 90 days and a final report in 1 year, and then go out of business. ■ **D. M. B.**



Eugene Mayberry: AIDS chairman.

Goslin Leaves NAS

David Goslin, longtime head of the National Research Council's Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, will be leaving his post in the fall to head the American Institutes for Research, in Washington, D.C. The AIR, founded in 1946, is a nonprofit corporation doing research, development and evaluation in behavior, human factors, and epidemiology, primarily for the Department of Defense and the Department of Health and Human Services. ■ **C.H.**