OSTP Gears Up for Change

Jack Gibbons is planning to leave after more than 4 years as the president's science adviser. White House officials see an MIT professor and old Washington hand as someone who can revitalize the office

As an April Fools' Day joke, Jack Gibbons told some of his staff that he intended to resign as President Bill Clinton's science adviser and retire from government service. The announcement was a prank, but it appears that only the timing was wrong. Administration sources say that the 68-year-old Gibbons will step down as head of the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) by the end of the year. The leading candidate to replace him, they say, is John Deutch, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) chemistry professor with extensive government experience as the Pentagon's second in command and head of the Central Intelligence Agency.

If he gets the job, Deutch would have a mandate from the White House to revitalize OSTP, which has been pushed to the sidelines in debates over national science policy. Insiders say they hope that Deutch's arrival would add weight and political savvy to an office viewed as lacking clout by many in Congress, the Administration, and the scientific community. That may prove tough, however, given that OSTP has no direct budgetary authority and the president's science adviser must tread a fine line between being an advocate for the research community and a loyal team player.

Gibbons told *Science* last week that he has informed Clinton and Vice President Al Gore that he wants to leave office well before the end of the Administration. But, he adds, "I'm still here indefinitely." Indeed, he says he is in the process of choosing two new associate directors—as of this week, all four positions are filled by acting heads or nominees awaiting Senate confirmation. He quickly adds, however, that they will be "first-rate people who would wear well with any successor."

Earlier this week, the White House moved to quash rumors that Gibbons's departure is imminent and that Deutch is the heir apparent. It issued a statement that Gibbons "may desire to leave his post near the end of the year," but added that "any contemplation of his successor is premature speculation." However, sources have told *Science* that Deutch is the front-runner, although the transition is not expected until the end of the year because of Deutch's personal obligations. He did not return calls seeking comment.

An affable administrator with long experience in Washington, Gibbons is widely credited for a close working relationship with Gore, his creation of the National Science and Technology Council (NSTC), and for helping to ward off R&D cuts proposed by the last Republican Congress. But many science and technology advocates believe that a powerful political insider like Deutch would help give the office more political clout. Stricter White House management in Clinton's second term has left OSTP with less direct influence in setting policy, while the NSTC has never garnered the authority of other such White House councils. The science adviser's office itself lacks firepower: Two of Gibbons's original lieutenants—those who oversee the environment and national security—left last spring, and their successors still have not been confirmed by the Senate. Replacements for the other two slots (science and technology) haven't even been nominated. The technology post has had an acting head since October.

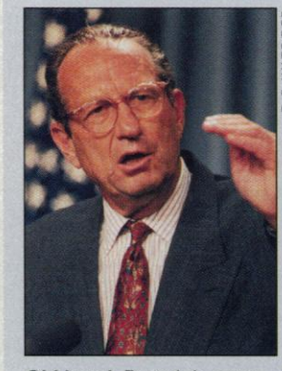
This power vacuum has not gone unnoticed. A recent outside study calls for a stronger and more focused office, while two executive agencies are making moves to expand their influence in R&D policy. Moreover, lawmakers and their staffs worry that the science office is too quiet. "We didn't hear from Gibbons on any of our authorization bills," says Representative James Sensenbrenner (R–WI), who chairs the House Science Committee. "And we could have used some input."

Gibbons gently dismisses such criticism. "We're not in disarray," he says, citing a host of reports and policy initiatives led by his office, as well as the NSTC and the President's Committee of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST), which he co-chairs. In addition to "holding the line" against significant cuts proposed in the past 2 years by Republicans, he says, the president's 1998 budget is his fifth straight request for greater R&D funding. "But we have suffered because of vacancies not filled," Gibbons adds.

Sharper focus

Outside groups say that the problems go deeper than a few tardy appointments. The Carnegie Commission on Science, Technology, and Government—a panel of distinguished scientists, university presidents, and industry managers—recently offered up new

Deutch Treads MIT-Washington Axis



R. D. WARD/DOD

Old hand. Deutch is a veteran of Washington politics.

Presidential science advisers typically have stronger ties to the research community than to the upper echelons of Washington political life. But John Deutch, currently the leading candidate to replace Jack Gibbons as science adviser and head of the Office of Science and Technology Policy, has long divided his attention between both sectors.

The 58-year-old Deutch, a chemistry professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), certainly has strong roots in academia. He holds a Ph.D. from MIT, which he joined in 1970 as a faculty member. Later, he became chemistry department chair, dean of science, and ultimately provost.

Deutch has hardly lived an ivy-covered existence, however. Taking leave from MIT in 1977, he joined the Energy Department during the Carter Administration and eventually became undersecretary. After President Clinton's election in 1992, he joined the Defense Department and wound up as deputy defense secretary before moving over to head up the Central Intelligence Agency. He returned to MIT in December when Clinton named a new national security team.

Deutch is likely to be named soon to the President's Committee of Advisors on Science and Technology. Given his close ties to senior White House officials and key lawmakers, Deutch is expected to have an easy time winning confirmation if his name is submitted once again to the Senate. –A.L.

advice to the Administration, based on a review of OSTP's record during Clinton's first term. The report, issued in March, calls for a stronger and more focused policy shop in the executive office. It recommends additional employees, a chief of staff to handle internal matters, and a written agreement between OSTP and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) that spells out OSTP's role in determining the R&D budget. The report also recommends a major reorientation of the NSTC, which includes representatives from all agencies involved in R&D matters. Instead of focusing on programs, the report says, the council should devote itself to a "small number of priority policy issues of concern to the president." Meanwhile, the Carnegie panel says key players such as OMB are turned off by the large number of panels—now about 60—involved in NSTC's work and have lost their enthusiasm for the process.

Gibbons disputes many of these conclusions. He notes that the council has played a key role in developing important policy initiatives, such as one aimed at tackling emerging infectious diseases and announced by Gore last July. The council has since worked to coordinate federal research efforts on Lyme disease, hantavirus, and Ebola, among others. Gibbons also points out that the number of NSTC subcommittees is shrinking—the 10 environmental and natural resources subcommittees have dwindled to five, for example. "It took a couple of years to put a strategy in place," he says. "Now we're streamlining operations." He also rejects the idea of a formal agreement with OMB. "That would be a mistake," Gibbons says. "Relationships have to be nurtured, and you can't do that with a formal agreement."

One area that Gibbons and the Carnegie panel see eye to eye on, however, is the need for a better structure to deal with the administrative burdens of the job. He says he is in "an advanced stage" of thinking about hiring a chief of staff. Administration sources say the post will soon be filled by Holly Gwin, a lawyer and former OSTP counsel.

As OSTP struggles to find its proper niche, other science and technology agencies are stepping into the political vacuum. The mild-mannered National Science Board (NSB), for example, recently endorsed a plan to offer broader science policy advice to the government (*Science*, 14 March, p. 1555). "We're not trying to do OSTP's job, and we don't think we'll be in conflict," insists Stanford University chemist Richard Zare, the board's chair. He says that the board simply wants to develop a new vision that goes beyond its direction and oversight of the National Science Foundation's programs. Gibbons says he has encouraged the NSB to think more broadly, but there are limits. "You can't have two PCASTs," he warns, adding that "I'm concerned that they first do their job [to oversee] the foundation."

At the Commerce Department, the technology administration office has become more involved in interagency efforts because OSTP lacks the staff to coordinate activities. "We're probably doing more work" as a result of the vacancies, says chemist Mary Good, who heads the Commerce Department office. For example, she says Commerce is "carrying the burden" in the effort to coordinate state and federal R&D efforts. At the same time, Administration sources point to tension between her operation and the one Gibbons runs because of a widespread view that she is lobbying for his job. "I'm too old for that kind of thing—running OSTP," insists Good. And Gibbons declines to criticize his colleague, saying only that "Mary has a strong personality ... and she has her own ideas about technology policy."

WHITE HOUSE

Hands-on science. Gibbons stands next to Gore as President Clinton creates the National Science and Technology Council.

A tighter rein

Major reshuffling in the White House after Clinton's reelection also is making life more difficult for OSTP managers. The more free-wheeling structure of the first Administration has given way to a tighter organization and a new deputy chief of staff, John Podesta, who takes a keen interest in science and technology issues. So, while Gibbons still maintains close contact with Gore, he now must navigate another level of White House management.

Before taking the job, Podesta served as president and general counsel of Podesta Associates, a Washington lobbying firm with many high-tech clients concerned with R&D issues. "I have some background in it," he says. "I try to work closely and coordinate with Jack," as well as with Gene Sperling, head of the National Economic Council. "We try to set goals and objectives," he adds. For example, Podesta says his shop played the central role in coordinating the Administration's response to the recent news about the cloning of sheep (*Science*, 7 March, p. 1415).

Gibbons, however, says that "I don't think I've gotten a single piece of paper from John Podesta. ... It's more a communications link." As for the cloning issue, Gibbons points out that he briefed the president on the subject, although "we let [Podesta's office] know what we were doing."

But some observers say a larger role for Podesta would be good news for R&D advocates. "There is a lack of attention to science and technology issues at the higher levels of the Administration, primarily because of the ineffectiveness of OSTP," says lawyer Ken Kay, a long-time science and technology lobbyist who worked under Podesta and now heads a business consulting firm, Infotech Strategies. "Having him there is nothing but a plus."

Podesta won't comment on any personnel changes, but he says the second Clinton Administration views science and technology policy "less as an esoteric academic aside and more as a primary part of our agenda for keeping the economy strong." The next few weeks will see "high-level presidential attention on his vision of the role of science and technology in people's lives and in the economy," he predicts—including initiatives that will entail changes to the Administration's budget priorities.

New blood

If Deutch were to succeed Gibbons, Administration officials believe he would be more of a political infighter with better access to Clinton, which would result in a more powerful NSTC, a more active PCAST, and an OSTP that focuses more heavily on technology issues and how they interact with economic and regulatory policy. But it will be hard for anyone to overcome the handicaps built into the job.

A lack of authority over agency R&D budgets, minimal staff, and the inherent tension of serving both a president and a typically apolitical academic community are all part of the position. Some scientists, for example, complain that Gibbons has been too partisan in his dealings with the Republican Congress, while others insist he has not played enough of the political game. That conundrum has plagued all science advisers. "It's one of the worst jobs, because you are caught between the White House and the research community," says one Administration official.

Gibbons's preference for consensus and

his easygoing manner, however, have allowed turf fights to break out among his associate directors, hindering progress on education and technology initiatives and making it harder for the science adviser to be heard at the Cabinet table, say Administration sources. They add that this posture has opened the door for others, such as Kathleen McGinty, chair of the Council on Environmental Quality, to expand their influence through such means as winning personnel slots at the expense of OSTP. "He's intellectually bright and unbelievably nice, but sometimes he needs to be a bit more authoritarian and dictatorial," says one former White House associate.

Gibbons, a courtly Virginian, doesn't apologize for his management style. "If you have to be a bully, that's a sad commentary," he says. In the long run, he says, being polite and seeking consensus pay off. But in the cutthroat world of the White House, that style may put OSTP at a disadvantage. "He's from a gentlemanly era," says one colleague. "You need a tougher person." The question is whether any successor to Gibbons—even someone with the savvy and access of Deutch—can forge a truly powerful office that puts R&D in the limelight.

–Andrew Lawler

REFORM IN JAPAN

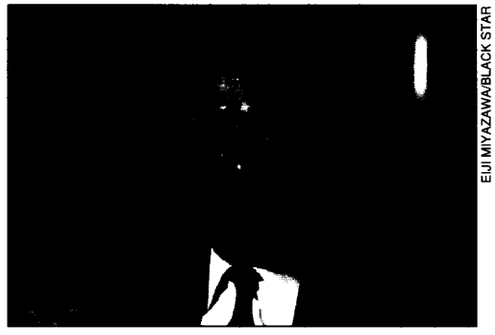
War on Debt Puts Big Science Under Fire

TOKYO—Japanese researchers are keeping a wary eye on governmental reform efforts that could significantly affect scientific activities. Two advisory councils, charged with streamlining the bureaucracy and shrinking a ballooning national debt, are said to be taking a hard look at spending on big science projects, including some high-profile international endeavors, and may even question the need for one of the country's major scientific agencies.

The efforts, which will gather steam over the coming months, stem from promises made during last fall's election campaign by the Liberal Democrat Party (LDP). Shortly after receiving a vote of confidence last October, Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto created two panels to recommend sweeping changes: the Administrative Reform Council, charged with producing a plan by November to streamline the bureaucracy, and the Fiscal Structure Reform Council, which is supposed to report in June on ways to tackle the nation's snowballing debt. The panels—made up of academic, business, and civic leaders and chaired by the prime minister—include just one scientist: physicist Akito Arima, president of the Institute of Physical and Chemical Research (RIKEN). News about their private deliberations is now beginning to trickle out, raising anxiety about how science will fare in the reviews.

Few dispute the need for fiscal reforms. As a percentage of gross domestic product, Japan's $2 trillion debt—incurred in an effort to revive a sluggish economy—is among the highest of all the industrialized nations. Cutting overall government spending, however, will make it difficult to follow a plan adopted last year to boost R&D spending significantly over the next 5 years (*Science*, 28 June 1996, p. 1868). Indeed, the fiscal reform panel recently told the head of the Science and Technology Agency (STA) that it would not exempt the 17-trillion-yen ($136 billion) spending plan from its deficit-cutting efforts (*Science*, 25 April, p. 519).

Science has learned that the committee intends to take a hard look at big science projects. The list includes space activities, including the international space station; the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER); and the nation's extensive nuclear-power research program. "Some people [within the fiscal reform council] say that these projects should be suspended," says Minoru Yonekura, an official in the STA's planning department. Although official support for ITER and the space station remains strong, he predicts that "compared to 5 years ago, it is going to be very difficult to launch new big science projects."



EIJI MIYAZAWA/BLACK STAR

Council compromise. Arima says fiscal reforms may stretch out 5-year spending plan.

One compromise may be to stretch the 5-year plan over 7 years. Arima says he "may agree with the fiscal reform council" on the need for an extension as long as the goal of increased governmental support for science is maintained. Despite pressure from the committee, Yonekura says STA hopes to keep the current schedule for growth on track: "We will make efforts to maintain the current [5-year] plan."

Keeping the plan intact isn't the only thing Yonekura and his colleagues may have to worry about, however. Their entire agency could fall victim to the far-reaching reforms that LDP officials have promised voters. One popular idea is halving the current number of Cabinet-level ministries and agencies, and the Administrative Reform Council has been asked to produce a plan to achieve that goal. Later this month, that council will begin to quiz the 21 ministries and agencies on their functions and relations with other agencies.

A prime candidate for pruning is the $5.8 billion, 41-year-old STA, in large part because of its relative youth, small budget, and widely dispersed constituency. Two ministries that may be asked to absorb it are the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture (Monbusho) and the Ministry of International Trade and Industry.

Not surprisingly, STA officials oppose any change in status. Nobuaki Kawakami, who monitors administrative reform for the agency, says any merger would likely result in "reducing the [government's] promotion of science and technology." Arima believes that it is too early to forecast STA's fate.

In addition to the tasks set for it by the politicians, the administrative reform committee has received pleas for help from various groups. For example, 13 professors at the University of Tokyo Medical School submitted a petition in March to the Administrative Reform Council, to another government reform committee, and to Monbusho, seeking greater autonomy from government-wide rules for the medical school and hospital, particularly on budgetary and personnel affairs.

But the strategy appears to have backfired. The letter was seen by some government officials as a plea to privatize the hospital, and the group antagonized the medical school's faculty council by not consulting it first. Hiroyuki Yoshikawa, who retired last month as president of the university, says that a majority of faculty members at the University of Tokyo and at other national universities share the group's concerns, but that the letter has sown confusion as to what university faculty members think about reform. One professor who signed the letter declined to discuss the matter, saying it had "become a big problem."

Even so, the resulting furor may not amount to anything. Arima says the Administrative Reform Council is likely to concentrate on Cabinet-level ministries and agencies and leave university reform for another time. However, that still gives researchers plenty to worry about.

–Dennis Normile