

BIOMEDICAL POLICY

Satcher Tapped for Top Health Posts

The White House last week nominated David Satcher, head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, for two top health policy posts: Surgeon General of the U.S. Public Health Service and Assistant Secretary for Health (ASH) in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). As Surgeon General he will have a bully pulpit for highlighting public health issues, while as ASH, he will be in a position to help shape biomedical research policy.

Satcher, 56, who holds a Ph.D. in cytogenetics and a medical degree from Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, has spent most of his career in community health and as an administrator (*Science*, 29 March 1996, p. 1910). He was dean of historically black Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee, before he took the helm of CDC in 1993. There he has emphasized such areas as preventive medicine and the need to stem violence in inner cities and has dealt with such controversies as drug trials involving pregnant women in developing countries.

The White House is apparently treading cautiously with the nomination. Satcher's

name was first floated for the combined position of Surgeon General and Assistant Secretary for Health 7 months ago (*Science*, 28 February, p. 1251). No objections have yet been raised, and the Senate committee that must approve Satcher's nomination says it expects to move quickly. This is in sharp contrast to President Bill Clinton's previous nominee, W. Henry Foster Jr., whose appointment as surgeon general was shot down by Congress in 1995 because he had performed abortions. The surgeon general spot has been vacant since Joycelyn Elders resigned in 1994 after making controversial comments about masturbation and legalizing drugs.

By combining the post with that of ASH, the Administration is hoping to give Satcher more direct influence over biomedical policy. ASH's status was downgraded about 18 months ago, when oversight of CDC, the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Food and Drug Administration, and other

HHS agencies was shifted from ASH to the HHS secretary. But the assistant secretary still heads HHS's Office of Public Health and Science and oversees HIV/AIDS policy and

the offices of women's and minority health. Moreover, Jo Ivey Boufford, acting ASH from 31 January—when then-Assistant Secretary Phil Lee retired—until she left in June to become dean of the New York University School of Public Service, says the assistant secretary is “sort of the secretary's senior adviser” on such matters as the NIH budget and coordinates cross-agency projects like the recent food safety initiative. Among the tasks awaiting Satcher, Boufford says, may be implementing the changes to the

Office of Research Integrity recommended by an internal working group and a project examining the future of academic health centers.

Public health researchers have endorsed Satcher's nomination, and Boufford agrees that he's “very well suited for the position. ... He's a thoughtful person, he's very good at bringing disparate groups together, and he's well regarded in the department.”

—Jocelyn Kaiser



Two hats. Surgeon General nominee David Satcher.

SCIENCE BUREAUCRACY

USGS Chief Resigns After Tough Tenure

After more than 3 years as head of the nation's biggest natural resources research and geologic mapping agency, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) director Gordon Eaton last week announced he will retire on 1 October. Eaton's decision came just after he told staff that Department of Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt had instructed the agency to move its western headquarters away from Menlo Park, in the high-rent San Francisco Bay area. Eaton's announcement triggered a firestorm of criticism from members of California's congressional delegation.

Some observers have speculated that Eaton's departure is tied to the uproar over Menlo Park and earlier, controversial management decisions. But in an interview with *Science*, Eaton insisted there is no connection. In a lengthy memo announcing his departure to employees, he noted that he was 65 when he became director and explained that “from the beginning it was understood that my tenure would be relatively short.”

It may have been short, but Eaton's tenure was also tumultuous. He had the misfortune to come on board in March 1994, shortly before the midterm elections ushered in a new Republican Congress that initially pledged to do away with the \$746 million agency. In the end, Congress preserved USGS and even gave it more

authority: Last year, it abolished the National Biological Service as a separate agency and moved it under USGS's wing, making USGS the sole science agency in Interior.

Several steps Eaton took to protect the agency have been controver-



No connection. Gordon Eaton (inset) says departure isn't linked to relocation of Menlo Park offices.



sial, however. His emphasis on “mission-oriented” research in the Geologic Division eroded basic research in areas such as earthquakes and geochronology, some researchers complained (*Science*, 30 June 1995, p. 1840). Some USGS scientists have also charged

that a massive layoff in that division in 1995, in which 525 staff jobs were cut, was aimed at ousting whistle blowers (17 November 1995, p. 1107). Last year, an investigation of the layoff by a House Government Reform subcommittee found the extent to which job descriptions were rewritten was “unusual,” but legal, according to a staffer. Still, several dozen scientists are appealing the job cuts, and 11 of the 36 Menlo Park scientists have gotten their jobs back.

More turmoil ensued late last month, when Eaton issued a memo instructing staff to “cancel immediately” all lease renewals at Menlo Park in anticipation of moving to cheaper locations within 5 years (*Science*, 5 September, p. 1425). Most stunning to researchers, the memo said the 260-member earthquake hazards group, which is linked to hundreds of seismology stations and has strong ties to local universities, had to relocate in just 1 year.

California's two senators and 10 of the Bay Area's congressional representatives fired off letters of protest to Babbitt. The House members said in a 5 September letter that they were “alarmed and deeply concerned” at the “narrow scope of options allowed” and the “exceedingly short time frame” outlined in the memo. Babbitt's response, in letters sent on 11 September, seems to step back. He said USGS officials “will evaluate the full range of