

ducing the nuclear industry—especially the utilities—to pay for the work instead. In Washington, it is argued that the industry really ought to shoulder a larger part of the burden for safety research, now that nuclear energy is a commercial reality. "They have to stand on their own two feet," Shaw says of the utilities and vendors.

But a number of the critics at Oak Ridge and Idaho fear that, if the commission is too successful in this endeavor (which to date it has not been), the AEC may cripple its own ability to judge the quality of industry-sponsored work. To Washington, this bears a taint of special pleading, but the critics respond that the entire effort raises still more questions of conflicting interests. As one senior administrator puts it, "This is like asking the agricultural chemical industry to tell us how safe pesticides are."

These feelings are coupled closely with the researcher's irritation at RDT's practice of letting reactor manufacturers review their proposals for new research, before RDT passes judgment on the proposals. In an interview, an administrator at Idaho expressed the complaint this way:

Shaw will say, "Have you found a problem? Just send us a proposal." So we send a proposal. First it's screened by teams of engineers in his office before anyone, including REG, has a chance to comment on it. If it gets past this stage, they send it to the vendors for comment. Not to impartial experts in universities or foundations, but to the vendors. And great Scott, the industry is very upset by these proposals. We keep raising questions that they'd just as soon not hear about. They've already convinced REG that it's not a problem at all. . . . In the end, RDT chooses to identify with the needs of the industry, not the regulatory staff.

Officials in Washington have an explanation for this procedure, which is simply that they want to ensure that safety research is related to practical problems of reactor design. Pressesky makes the point that proposals go simultaneously to vendors and the regulatory staff, and sometimes not to vendors at all. Accusations of favoritism toward industry are flatly denied. "I hear things about conflict of interest all the time," Shaw says. "I can't let it bother me. . . . Some of the industry people come down on us just as hard."

How are relations now between the development and regulatory sides of the AEC? In some respects things are looking up. Funds for reactor safety are up to \$53 million this year, and

about half the increase since 1971 has gone toward water reactors. Perhaps the most charitable judgment of the present situation comes from L. Manning Muntzing, the director of regulation, who told the Joint Committee last March that his staff had a "very close working relationship" with the RDT.

If that is true, it would seem to represent a dramatic transformation. Only a month before, the ACRS again criticized the RDT for failing to heed the interests of the regulatory staff. In a letter to the new chairman, James Schlesinger, the ACRS ticked off a list of problems yet unsettled, some still hanging fire from the middle 1960's. Among its demands, the ACRS asked

for "special emphasis" on fuel studies of the sort Oak Ridge used to do, and it suggested that, "in the future, the AEC safety research program should reflect more directly in extent and detail the recommendations and needs of the Regulatory staff and the ACRS."

It was a familiar refrain, and one that evidently caught the ear of the General Accounting Office, the investigatory arm of Congress. Although no congressman has asked it to do so, the GAO has initiated its own investigation of the turbulent relations between the safety program and the regulatory staff. The GAO expects to have its report ready sometime next spring.

—ROBERT GILLETTE

Briefing

Bill Boosting NSF Moves to House

The Senate's decisive vote passing S.32, the measure which would strengthen the arm of the National Science Foundation (NSF) to raise the cudgel against national, domestic problems, has greatly improved chances of House passage sometime during the remainder of the year. However, there remain a number of obstacles—both to House passage and to the chances that the proposal will ever become reality—not the least of which is a virtual certainty of a presidential veto of the bill, whose chief sponsor is Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.).

The solid support from both liberals and conservatives, both Democratic and Republican, which caused the bill to sail out of committee early last summer (see *Science*, 7 July), obviously aided the Senate vote, which was 72 to 8. Some minor amendments were suggested during the debate, but the only important one to pass was one reducing the funds for the expanded NSF over its first 3 years from \$1.8 billion to \$1.025 billion.

The act would offer various kinds of aid to individual scientists and engineers, and also to certain industries and to depressed technical communities. NSF would become the overseer of a big, new Civil Science Systems Administration, modeled on the National Institutes of Health, to sponsor research and development.

There are now two obstacles to House passage of the bill this session, according to staffers in the Senate and House. One is whether the two key politicians who hold sway over organizing passage will take a strong interest in getting it through. The first is Representative George Miller (D-Calif.), age 81, chairman of the House Committee on Science and Astronautics, whose defeat in the June California primary could affect his attitude toward the final business of his Capitol Hill career. The other, Representative John W. Davis (D-Ga.), who heads the committee's subcommittee on research and development, currently faces a tougher reelection campaign than he expected. If Davis and Miller's interest proves minimal, it won't be the first time that back-home politics have affected a representative's dispatch of regular business in Washington.

A second issue in House passage is Senator George McGovern (D-S. Dak.). Many middle-of-the-road and conservative Democrats are currently wary about associating closely with McGovern's proposals. McGovern is a co-sponsor of S.32, and at one time it was thought that he would make a big campaign issue of it—as proof that he seeks improvement in the lot of research and development in nondefense fields. McGovern has been citing the bill in his campaign speeches, but so far, less often than expected, and the current educated guess among House staffers is that the bill's chances of passage will be much better if McGovern keeps it that way.—D.S.