

Briefing

OMB: Hand in the Till or on the Tiller?

The continuing hoopla over impoundment—the President's refusal to spend money that Congress has appropriated—shows signs of being pressed to an interesting showdown. Although Nixon has impounded the same proportion of appropriated funds as did his two Democratic predecessors (*Science*, 9 February), Congress has only now discovered that its constitutional prerogatives are being usurped. Moves are afoot to enable Congress to set a ceiling on expenditures, which would deprive the Executive of a principal justification for impoundment.

An opening shot in the impoundment battle was a bill passed in October requiring the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) at least to tell Congress what funds were impounded and why. The first such report, listing funds withheld as of 29 January, includes the following impoundments (in millions of dollars): National Science Foundation, 62.4; National Aeronautics and Space Administration (for research and development), 32.5; National Bureau of Standards (for research and technical services), 16.7; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (for R&D and facilities), 31.7; Agricultural Research Service, 10.2; Cooperative State Research Service, 3.5.

These impoundments amount to \$157 million, representing a 3 percent cut in estimated civilian R&D expenditures for fiscal 1973. The full list totals nearly \$9 billion. Congress, however, is not lying down under the challenge. . . . —N.W.

Davis Enters Anti-Impoundment Fight

... Congressman John W. Davis (D-Ga.) and his subcommittee on science, research, and development of the Committee on Science and Astronautics have entered the anti-impoundment fight between Congress and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) by including strong anti-impoundment wording in the National Science Foundation (NSF) authorization bill introduced to Congress on 7 February.

The anti-impoundment measure, if passed, would prohibit OMB from selective impoundment of funds for programs—a trick they have played with the NSF budget to the tune of \$62.4 million in a handful of programs. The new Davis bill would force OMB to make any cuts in the NSF budget across the board instead of in specific programs. Within a margin of 5 percent, if OMB delays funds for any single NSF budget category, it must also delay the same proportion in all other categories. If the President wants to take exception to the rule, he would have to send a special message to Congress. Congress would have 60 days to object to the proposed cuts. Since one of the keys to successful support of basic research and the education of scientists is that funding be relatively constant and stable, Davis and the committee think the NSF authorization could provide a good opportunity for testing the powers of Congress over the OMB.—D.S.

Jackson Wants Big Energy R & D Effort, a la Apollo

Senator Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.), chairman of the Senate Interior Committee, will soon introduce legislation calling for a \$20-billion program of research and development aimed at making the United States self-sufficient in energy by 1983. Jackson, one of the more influential members of the Senate, outlined his plans at a press conference on 15 February. He said that an energy R&D effort on the scale of Project Apollo would, among other things, help the United States to hold the line on the price of Middle Eastern oil.

The senator indicated that the massive R&D program he proposed would bring to fruition the technologies for the gassification of coal, production of shale oil, and development of the nuclear breeder reactor, only the last of which is currently receiving a high level of financial support. It would also step up exploration for geothermal energy. Jackson said the program would, in addition, look to some "far out" goals such as development of solar energy and energy from nuclear fusion. The senator said that the Nixon Administration's approach to energy

programs had shown a "lack of urgency." Under the new Administration budget, some \$772 million would be spent for energy R&D. The Jackson program would bring spending for this purpose up to an average of \$2 billion annually for 10 years.—L.J.C.

An Astronaut for Space Committee?

In recent weeks, John L. Swigert, Jr., one of the astronauts on the ill-fated Apollo 13 mission, has been mentioned as a possible candidate for the job of executive director of the House Committee on Science and Astronautics. Behind the move is Olin E. Teague (D-Tex.), the new committee chairman, who has made public statements to the effect that he would like to see an astronaut take the post. There have also been rumors that astronauts William Anders, now executive director of the National Aeronautics and Space Council, and Eugene Cernan, currently with the astronaut corps, are possible candidates. Presumably adding a former astronaut to the staff would lend a little glamour to the committee's operations.—D.S.

FDA Relents on Consumer Science Consultants

At a recent meeting with consumer representatives, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced it would allow consumer nominations to be made for the membership of a scientific review of food additives. This was a reversal of an earlier decision made in the agency to exclude consumer nominees from the review panels.

The additives in question are the "generally regarded as safe" or GRAS substances, which the FDA has asked to be reviewed by the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology. The consumer groups' list of nominees, who must, by law, be properly qualified and therefore scientists, is being collated by Michael F. Jacobson of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, Washington, D.C.—N.W.