

Federal Council Fears Future

At the end of this month, the Federal Council for Science and Technology (FCST), along with the residue of the Office of Science and Technology, will remove itself from the White House to the National Science Foundation (NSF). There its future seems far from roseate. The council is supposed to coordinate scientific affairs among federal agencies. The big question is whether high government officials will bother to attend meetings convened by an agency like the NSF, which is not even ranked at departmental level. "One must either be a fool or dissembling to suggest the council will have a higher stature in NSF," says a close observer of the FCST.

H. Guyford Stever, the director of the NSF, has replaced the President's science adviser as acting head of the FCST. In his position as NSF director, he may have problems in telling the administrator of NASA what to do about space or the director of NIH how to manage health affairs. Stever acknowledges that the need for coordination is less in the space field than in other sciences. But he is sure that other agency heads will participate in council meetings if the subject is of concern.

"It will really reduce to a kind of talking association, where the agency heads can get together for a chitchat about matters of common interest," predicts a White House official. "But," he adds, "there is not really much common interest between the director of the NSF and the chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission." Stever, however, says that the council "definitely has a future role."—N.W.

FAS Protests Cut in Biomedical Funds

Three Nobel laureates last week took the unusual step of going to Capitol Hill and complaining publicly about the Administration's treatment of biomedical research. Their appearance was part of a formidable expression of discontent organized by the Federation of American Scientists (FAS) and its

executive director Jeremy J. Stone.

The three laureates, Christian B. Anfinsen, Julius Axelrod, and Marshall Nirenberg, all of NIH, released a petition addressed to President Nixon and signed by some 3000 biomedical scientists. The covering letter, signed by a ninesome of Nobelists, observes that the President's crash-cure approach to funding biomedicine "reflects the standard error of nonscientists in their contemplation of basic research. . . . The emphasis on storming a few spectacular objectives is tending to disrupt research in other, no less important, areas." Second, the FAS petition charges that the decision to phase out the research training and fellowship grants seems to be based on a "free enterprise ideology taken from business that market forces will provide researchers in biomedicine."

The timing of the petition's release was intended to influence the fate of Senator Edward Kennedy's (D-Mass.) proposal, deadlocked in a House-Senate conference committee, that seeks to reverse the Administration's cuts in research training and fellowship grants.

The three sages at the FAS press conference knew what they did not like about the biomedical research budget but were not overwhelmingly specific on how or why the budget-makers should do otherwise. "They have dug into the very vitals of medical research and into the future of biomedical research in general," said Anfinsen. But when the trio was asked what level of funding would be just, Anfinsen replied: "It is a question of whether mankind is interested in ever and ever widening circles of wisdom. . . . What we would be satisfied with is almost impossible to answer." The question of what specific research ideas of merit were going unfunded produced only the observation that it is hard nowadays to get decent amounts of transfer-RNA.

While the laureates were unable to set any limit on the absolute amount of funds to which biomedical research is entitled, FAS director Stone argued that the cuts in funding, even if necessary, should have been effected gradually, and not so abruptly that the biomedical ship of state is made to "tack about like a PT boat."—N.W.

Does Daddario Want to Be OTA Head?

It is no secret that Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.), as chairman of the board of directors of the new Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) for Congress, wants Emilio Q. Daddario, former congressman and father of the technology assessment idea, to be the director of the office. But Daddario has never been offered the job, and, according to informed sources, has never said publicly whether he would accept such an offer.

According to custom, when a prospective agency head is under consideration, he visits individually all the relevant congressional committee members for a get-acquainted session. But although his name has been floating around for well over 6 months, Daddario has not yet completed his round of courtesy calls. (The new board even scheduled meetings in February and March, and held one in April, when it could have acted formally on the appointment, but did not.) For his part, Daddario says he sees "nothing unusual" about the pace of his nomination. He refuses to discuss his situation directly but suggests that it might be inappropriate for "a congressional committee" to make a "contract" with a director of OTA before it has an appropriation for the office.

In addition, the Senate Appropriations Committee has lowered the director's salary to \$36,000 per year—a sum below that paid to other agency heads with whom the OTA chief will have to deal. Daddario now makes an estimated \$40,000 with Gulf and Western Industries, Inc., and has traveled to Russia for them and frequently to Europe.

The congressional staffers trying to get OTA organized do not seem perplexed that the Daddario appointment remains in limbo. But one House staffer added a postscript to this: "If they [the board] had made a formal choice earlier, people would have been putting some ducks in a row. . . . [T]hey might be in a position to start moving when funds did become available. . . . So you might say there's been a delay in that way."—D.S.