

Commissioner Gilinsky Challenges New NRC Plan

"They will either be a supine lot and play dead," says Commissioner Victor Gilinsky of his colleagues on the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), "or else they will create a management nightmare" worse than any that has existed until now. Gilinsky does not like the reorganization plan for the NRC, which President Carter sent to Congress on 27 March, for he thinks it gives too much power to the NRC chairman. At best, the plan is illogical; at worst, a prescription for internecine office war. Although the White House is expecting little opposition, Gilinsky predicts that four of the five present commissioners (minus the acting chairman, John Ahearne) will march up to Capitol Hill and speak against the plan. Ahearne already has given his approval, although he tried to persuade the White House staff to give the NRC chairman more power than was granted. If it is not blocked by Congress or amended by the President within 60 days of its delivery to the Hill, the proposal automatically will become law.

Gilinsky concedes that he is a partisan in the debate, being one of those who will be cast into the shadows by the reorganization. But he finds a precedent for his case in the deliberations that led to the creation of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), the NRC's predecessor. One of the AEC commissioners, Thomas Murray, strongly objected to proposed legislation in 1954 which he said would lead to the "centralization of authority in the chairman" and "pave the way to a de facto one-man commission." Because of Murray's objections, Congress inserted a clause giving all commissioners equal authority in policy decisions and equal access to information.

It might make sense to create a strong executive agency with one head, Gilinsky argues, but if that is the objective, it makes no sense to retain four of the five commissioners as ceremonial appendages. What if they should, God forbid, take their jobs seriously and get into a policy dispute with the chairman? Might he not invoke his new authority to keep information from them? All the ingredients

for trouble would be present. "Those guys over there [in the White House] don't seem to understand how a commission works," Gilinsky says. "You must have a majority to make a decision. And if you don't trust majority rule, you shouldn't have a commission."

Gilinsky is most concerned about the provisions in the NRC reorganization plan that would alter the flow of information. According to an analysis prepared by his legal assistant, "the plan would have the anomalous result of permitting the head of an NRC office to communicate such information as he thought critical to public safety to the Commission . . . but of preventing the Commission from obtaining the same information if the office head thought it not relevant. . . ." Furthermore, since most of the staff would serve at the pleasure of the NRC chairman, there could be a tendency to report only the information that the chairman wanted reported. Gilinsky would like a guarantee of equal authority for all commissioners in policy matters and in access to information, more authority over the staff, and the right to approve the selection of some office directors and committee members not permitted in the President's plan.

The other commissioners have not announced where they stand, but they will have a chance to do so at hearings scheduled in late April before the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee.

MX Missile: A Step Backward for Metric

Like the fog in Chicago, "metrication" is creeping into the federal government on little cats' feet. As provided for in the Metric Conversion Act of 1975, federal agencies are encouraging their staffs and contractors to switch voluntarily from pounds and inches to metric measurements. The whole process is being overseen by the U.S. Metric Board, which has been rather slow in getting started. As a spokesman there said, it is "not yet a mover and a shaker in Washington." When asked how much the Defense Department had accomplished in its

conversion program, the same spokesman said, "We haven't the slightest idea; but if you know, I wish you'd tell us."

The Pentagon, in fact, declared its policy in a directive from the secretary on 19 March. All new designs will be made in metric measurements, except where a documented case can be made for doing otherwise. New acquisitions should conform to metric specifications when possible, particularly if the equipment is to be sold abroad or used in allied operations.

There has been one conspicuous backslider already: the Air Force's new mobile strategic missile, the MX. According to *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, the plan to build at least half of the MX in metric dimensions has been abandoned as a cost-cutting measure. Major General John Hepfer, head of the ballistic missile office, made the decision early this year, to the great disappointment of metric boosters. Reworking the design drawings will cost between \$100,000 and \$200,000 for each contractor involved, but in net terms the backslide will save the MX project about \$25 million.

NSF Finds Slower Growth in Scientific Work Force

Although the employment situation for scientists and engineers has improved in the last 2 years, the National Science Foundation (NSF) reports this sector of the labor force has not been growing as rapidly as in the past. According to a study released in March, the rate of unemployment has dropped from 3.0 to 1.4 percent since 1976. (The general unemployment rate is about 6 percent.) At the same time the rate of growth in the science and engineering population has declined from the annual figure of 7 percent—registered from 1974 to 1976—to about 2 percent now.

The greatest attrition has occurred in the fields of chemistry, physics, and the earth sciences; here the employed ranks have declined by 5 to 10 percent. Meanwhile, the NSF says, computer science and psychology are booming. In these categories, the number of people with jobs has grown by more than 20 percent since 1976.

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