

had been supplied. On 7 April he finally got a copy of *Meltdown*, the story of an engineer at the nuclear plant with a pregnant wife and in-laws who run a nearby dairy farm. It was an inclusive treatment of local panic. Backstrom judged it to be "antinuclear." He says: "We felt it was advocating, or over-advocating a position; we don't do that here." With the concurrence of the center's chairman of the board, banker Howard Scaggs, and Johns Hopkins oceanographer Phillips, Backstrom canceled the show.

Backstrom considers the play poor drama as well as unsuitable "political science." Although he agreed to banish the work, Phillips disagrees on its merits as drama, saying it is a good play that deals with important issues. Phillips will try to find the authors an "appropriate" venue for their work.

The authors, who are now shortening the play, believe the officials at the science center simply panicked. The officials' major concern, Kramer says, is "to avoid alienating potential corporate backers" of the science center. He does not consider *Meltdown* a piece of advocacy. —**Elliot Marshall**

## The Perils of Isabelle: Under the Budget Ax

Federal funds totaling \$25 million have been cut from the fiscal 1982 budget for Isabelle, a partially built particle accelerator at Brookhaven National Laboratory that is beset with design problems. The original construction budget called for \$41 million.

The cutback was triggered by doubts about how to build 1100 superconducting magnets—the heart of the machine (*Science*, 21 November 1980). While greatly expanded R & D efforts are aimed at producing a new magnet design, work on the rest of the project, including a circular tunnel more than 2 miles long, has been slowed. The Reagan Administration cut \$20 million from the fiscal 1982 request for appropriations, and the House subcommittee on energy development and applications cut an additional \$5 million from its authorization bill. The bill has not yet left the full House Science and Technology Committee, and the remaining \$16 million in construction funds, according to a

congressional aide, could "still be turned upside down" in continuing budget battles. The Department of Energy (DOE), meanwhile, plans to come up with new estimates in June for the total cost of Isabelle and date of completion. The old schedule called for completion in 1986 at a cost of \$423 million. Says DOE official James E. Leiss: "The project has been delayed 1 to 2 years and will cost more." —**William J. Broad**

## Edwards Hears Criticism from Synfuels Industry

James Edwards, the secretary of energy, told a string of jokes but gave little comfort to an audience full of synthetic fuel fans who came to hear him speak in Washington on 15 April. Edwards appeared at a conference on synfuels, "Prospects Under the Reagan Administration," sponsored by the U.S. Committee of the World Energy Conference. If his talk is a guide, the prospects are not bright for alcohol projects, which at one point Edwards referred to as backyard stills. As for the rest of the industry, it can anticipate much deliberation before there will be any spending. The Administration has established a firm financial barrier: it will require at least 40 percent private equity in every future project it helps.

Walter Flowers, a former congressman who now represents a major backer of synfuels development, Wheelabrator-Frye Inc., challenged the secretary on the sluggishness that the Administration has shown in getting started. "Despite the soothing words we hear," Flowers said, "many in industry and on Capitol Hill suspect that the Administration has no intention of carrying through on the bipartisan effort Congress approved in 1980 to subsidize this new energy industry. Flowers listed six examples of initiatives delayed or killed and noted that there have been no nominations to the board of the U.S. Synthetic Fuels Corporation (SFC), which was created to oversee the subsidy program. Flowers warned that the government may be placing too much faith in domestic oil drilling as a solution to the energy problem, and he raised the specter of a panic leading to the cre-

ation of a national oil company. Like Flowers, other executives expressed frustration at their inability to find officials in the government interested in their problems. As several people pointed out, none of the senior appointive posts at the Department of Energy, save that of the secretary, has been filled.

Edwards' response was to reassure his listeners that he really does want to foster a commercial synfuels industry; he pointed out that \$17 billion, the amount appropriated for SFC loan guarantees and subsidies, "is a lot of money." He did not say how soon the SFC might begin to disburse it.

—**Elliot Marshall**

## College Students Fail Global Awareness Test

Most college seniors who took a test on international issues in 1980 could only answer half the questions correctly, according to the Educational Testing Service (ETS), which administered the test. It was given to 3000 students at 185 colleges. In announcing the results in April, ETS official Thomas Barrow said that he was surprised that only 10 to 15 percent of the seniors were able to achieve a passing grade—correct answers on two-thirds of the questions. The highest scores were in the middle eighties.

The questions were designed to gauge the students' knowledge of problems of larger than national scope; they dealt with such issues as the impact of oil consumption on the economy and the reasons for President Carter's attempt to discourage development of the nuclear breeder reactor. Historical questions proved the most difficult, Barrow reports, although students generally did better on questions on the social sciences than on those on the humanities. There was no correlation between courses taken and scores on the test. But there was one unsettling and clear-cut finding: students naming "education" as their field of study were by far the lowest scoring group. The high scorers were those who said they majored in history, math, and engineering, in that order.

—**Elliot Marshall**