



Duke University

Lemurs

function of animal care committees and is developing a system of periodic site visits to animal laboratories that would supplement inspections carried out according to the Animal Welfare Act by the Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

The growing pressure by animal welfare groups to reduce the use of animals in research has been met with growing alarm by researchers. A staff member says the intent of H.R. 6245 is to "raise the consciousness of researchers." Certainly it is raising their fears.—**Constance Holden**

NRC Gains a Third Reagan Appointee

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) gained its third Reagan appointee at 4 a.m. on 14 May when the Senate confirmed the nomination of James K. Asselstine to the commission. The vote came near the end of an all-night session on the Defense Department appropriation bill. Asselstine, 34, will replace Commissioner Peter Bradford, a sometime critic of the nuclear industry who now works for the governor of Maine.

Like Bradford, Asselstine is an attorney. He has served since 1975 in various posts at the NRC and on the congressional staffs that oversee the nuclear safety program. Most recently, he was senior staff member for nuclear matters on the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, serving at the direction of the Republican majority.

The nomination has been well received, even by groups such as the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) usually critical of the federal nuclear establishment. According to Michael Faden of UCS, "Asselstine is clearly the best nominee this Administration could have sent up. . . . In dealing with us on legislation, he has always been open and willing to listen to our point of view and perfectly straight when he disagreed with us." Faden was impressed that in his confirmation hearing, Asselstine said he would try to clear up unresolved safety issues. "It's good to hear a new commissioner say that his first priority is safety, not issuing licenses."

Asselstine demonstrated his independence on 17 May, hours after his swearing-in, by refusing to support an unusual Administration request for a new vote on a March decision involving the Clinch River breeder reactor. The NRC had decided not to allow accelerated construction. Asselstine's vote killed any chance of a speed-up.—**Elliot Marshall**

Block Ends Checks on USDA Peer Panels

Without comment, Secretary of Agriculture John Block on 20 May ordered an end to security checks on scientists sitting on peer review panels for the department. Agriculture



John Block

was the only federal research sponsor that submitted reviewers' names to the FBI for security clearances and to in-house checkers for political approval. The practice came to light in early May (*Science*, 7 May, p. 600), and prompted numerous letters of protest, as well as disapproving editorials in major newspapers.

—**Elliot Marshall**

DOD May Have to Pay Its Way on the Shuttle

The Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation has endorsed a bill that would require the Department of Defense (DOD) to immediately start paying the full cost of launching its payloads on the Space Shuttle. Under current policy, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) would pay about 60 percent of DOD's launch costs during the next 6 years (*Science*, 16 April, p. 278; 14 May, p. 717).

"With a projected budget during this fiscal year of over \$200 billion and a Defense Department space budget of over \$8 billion, the DOD should not have to be subsidized at the expense of our country's civil aeronautics and space programs," said Senator Harrison H. Schmitt (R-N.M.), chairman of the subcommittee on science, technology, and space.

The full committee incorporated this sentiment into its proposed authorization bill for NASA's fiscal year 1983 budget, which it approved on 11 May. The bill would deduct \$409 million from space shuttle operations—the additional contributions assumed from DOD—and distribute it among NASA's other programs. Highlights include an additional \$40 million for planetary exploration; \$64 million for aeronautics research and technology; \$90 million to start work on a fifth shuttle orbiter; and \$150 million for development of the Centaur Upper Stage. The bill also includes approval for NASA to proceed with the Solar Maximum Repair/Retrieval mission. There are no new starts, however.

At this writing the committee is preparing to send the bill to the Senate floor for a vote, which could come at any time. The proposal's fate on the floor is anyone's guess, especially since the \$409 million would have to come out of DOD's budget—which the Senate has already passed. Moreover, any NASA budget passed by the Senate will have to be reconciled with the NASA budget recently passed by the House of Representatives. The House bill would add \$35 million to aeronautics research, but says nothing about DOD's shuttle payments.

—**M. Mitchell Waldrop**