

budget for the NHLI was \$232 million, the Administration's budget request for 1973 was for \$255 million and Congress had stepped in with a huge increase to \$320 million.

Like their colleagues at the National Cancer Institute, officials in the National Heart and Lung Institute are planning on the basis that they will receive at least the money requested in the Administration's budget. But the amount contained in the vetoed bill constitutes such a quantum leap from the present budget level that any euphoria arising from the increase earmarked in the Administration's budget will quickly be dampened if the institute does not also get at least some of the extra money voted by Congress.

Asked last week which programmes may be affected by the veto, Dr Robert Ringler, Deputy Director of the NHLI, suggested that research into diseases of the lungs and new efforts directed towards ascertaining risk factors associated with heart disease may not receive the early financial boost that was planned for them. NHLI took over responsibility for lung research in 1969, and Dr Ringler said that he believes that area of the institute's activities has not been able to grow rapidly enough.

As far as the National Institutes of Health as a whole are concerned, NIH officials are now involved in negotiations with the Office of Management and Budget for the 1974 budget, uncertain of the funding level for 1973. They can be sure of one thing, however. With the Administration fixed on its present course to hold down federal spending, OMB will probably not realize much more money for 1973 than the Administration requested—whatever Congress decides.

#### HUMAN EXPERIMENTATION

### Ethics in Public

by our Washington Correspondent

SENATOR KENNEDY's amendment to the Defense Appropriations Bill, which is designed to force the Department of Defense to draw up fresh guidelines for research involving human subjects (see *Nature*, **239**, 363; 1972), has survived scrutiny by a conference committee, been cleared by Congress and will become law when the bill receives President Nixon's signature. Flushed with the success of that minor foray into the field of medical ethics, Kennedy announced recently that his health subcommittee intends to hold hearings into human experimentation early next session, and that he has instructed his staff to seek out any evidence of experiments which have a dubious ethical base.

What seems to have pushed Senator Kennedy into announcing the hearings

so far in advance is the disclosure of a study of the effects of prophylactic treatment of premature babies with the antibiotic chloramphenicol, which was conducted at Los Angeles County Hospital in 1958. According to an article to be published in *World* magazine, there was considerable doubt about the safety of the drug in the early 1950s, although by the end of the decade it was still being sold in large quantities. The study was therefore designed to establish whether the survival rate for premature babies was increased or diminished by the drug.

The study came up with clear evidence that chloramphenicol used as a prophylactic greatly increased the mortality rate in premature babies when compared with penicillin or even no drug at all, and the study played a large part in the drastic reduction of use of the drug in nurseries.

According to Kennedy, one of the chief doubts about the experiment is that it involved chiefly the children of poor uneducated Americans, and he also wondered why the drug was still in use twenty years after its dangers had been brought to light. According to a doctor involved in the study, however, it was then standard practice to give antibiotics to premature babies as prophylactics, and by causing chloramphenicol to be virtually taken out of such usage, the research was valuable.

#### FEDERAL SPENDING

### Two More Casualties

by our Washington Correspondent

LEGISLATION dealing with science and technology figures prominently among the casualties of President Nixon's campaign to hold down federal spending. Last week, after having refused to sign the appropriations bill for the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, he vetoed legislation designed to set up within the National Institutes of Health an institute for research on ageing and declined to put his signature to a bill which would have substantially increased federal support for minerals research. Both bills were classed in the category of "budget wreckers" by Nixon, although he said that an added reason for turning down the minerals research bill was that it would have fragmented federal programmes in that field. Congress had no chance to override his vetoes because they came well after the adjournment.

The proposed National Institute on Aging (see *Nature*, **239**, 425; 1972) would have been the focal point of the federal government's biomedical research programme into the ageing process and it would also have been concerned with the psychological and sociological problems associated with growing old. Sponsored by Senator

## Short Notes

### A Slight Delay

Two technical hitches have delayed the launch of NASA's gamma ray astronomy satellite, SAS-B. The launch, which was set to take place on November 2 from the San Marco range off the coast of Kenya, is now expected to take place on November 16. One problem was with the Scout rocket, in which the gyro did not function properly; it was replaced with a spare on site. The second problem was a bad solder joint in the telemetry encoder aboard the spacecraft. The unit had to be flown back to the United States for repairs, but it is now undergoing final checks in Kenya.

SAS-B will be the first satellite devoted entirely to gamma-ray astronomy since the small and relatively unsophisticated Explorer II.

### Erratum

The item last week in Short Notes under the heading "Kennedy Bill" (*Nature*, **240**, 8; 1972) was included by mistake—the hearings referred to were in fact held in September. The Editor apologizes for any confusion this may have caused.

Tom Eagleton, the bill was rushed through Congress shortly before it adjourned, but the legislation did not contain any budget figure for the proposed institute—that would have been determined by the appropriations committees after review of how much of the work of other institutes in NIH would have been taken over by the new institute. The bill was a direct result of recommendations from the recent White House Conference on Aging, and Mr McGovern lost no time in castigating President Nixon for reneguing on his promise to implement the recommendations from that conference.

The other casualty, the bill designed to aid minerals research, would have provided the Department of the Interior with money to finance research on minerals and mining technology at academic and industrial institutions. Some of the money would also have gone towards setting up research centres at state-supported universities and colleges. The bill authorized expenditures of \$25.2 million in the 1973 fiscal year, increasing to about \$40 million in five years' time. Both bills enjoyed strong bipartisan support during their passage through the Congressional mill, and will probably reappear next year. They should fare better outside the atmosphere of election-year politics.