

turned from bad to worse in January when the Administration's budget was unveiled to reveal savage cutbacks in a variety of biomedical research programmes. More recently, considerable alarm has been generated at NIH by a memorandum from the Office of Management and Budget attacking the peer review system by which grant proposals are evaluated for scientific merit (see *Nature*, 243, 257; 1973).

It is thus a troubled agency that Dr Robert S. Stone inherited last week when he was officially confirmed as the new NIH Director. A pathologist who has been Dean of the School of Medicine of the University of New Mexico for the past five years, Dr Stone's appointment has not caused much of a stir at NIH. He is very much an unknown quantity and the general attitude there seems to be to wait and see. But some scientists polled last week said that they are at least happy that he has had some research experience (in tumour virology, etiology of lung diseases and development of a regional plan for meson radiotherapy of cancer), unlike a few of the candidates who were rumoured to have been in the running for the job.

One of the chief reasons for discontent at the firing of Dr Marston last year was that it is widely suspected that he was removed by the White House essentially because he voiced opposition to some Administration policies (no official reasons have ever been given) and Dr Stone's public statements and positions will be carefully watched to see whether he will toe the Administration line. At his first meeting with the press last week Dr Stone gave few things away.

He maintained several times that he has been given no instructions about policy from the White House or from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, and said that he expects to voice his own opinions vigorously in the formulation of policy. As for a specific issue which has been troubling several people, namely that the National Cancer Institute and the National Heart and Lung Institute between them soaked up all the increase in the NIH budget while other institutes suffered cuts, Dr Stone merely said that the balance of funds between institutes and between programmes needs to be continually under review. He added, however, that "it is less important where the money is, as long as a substantial amount is going into fundamental research".

Turning to the question of training grants, Dr Stone did not say outright whether or not he agrees with the Administration's decision to phase them out entirely. The NIH is on record, however, as vigorously defending training grants last year in the preparation of the budget document, but it lost the battle to the Office of Management and



Dr Robert S. Stone, New Director of the National Institutes of Health.

Budget. Dr Stone acknowledged that training grants have been very important "in building up a cadre of scientists", and he added that if the question is reopened, he will "bring my viewpoint on what training grants have accomplished", which seems to come close to suggesting that he will fight for them to be reinstated.

Finally, on the question of peer review, Dr Stone praised the accomplishments of the system and said that he is "clearly in support of peer review—I don't know what we can substitute for it". Specifically in regard to the OMB memorandum, he said "my bias is that scientists around the country have been reviewing each other's work with a high level of objectivity. I would be very careful about substituting anything for peer review".

Dr Stone brings to the National Institutes of Health considerable experience as a scientist-administrator. Born in 1922, he received his BA degree from Brooklyn College, New York, in 1942 and his MD from the State University of New York College of Medicine in 1950. He moved to UCLA School of Medicine in 1952 and in 1963 was appointed Chairman of the Department of Pathology at the University of New Mexico. He became Dean of the School of Medicine there in 1968, managed to attract good staff, and built it up during a difficult financial period.

## Short Notes

### Lunar Radio Astronomy

A SATELLITE designed to study low frequency radio signals from galactic and extra-galactic radio sources is set for launch at the end of this week. Called Radio Astronomy Explorer-B (RAE-B), it will be placed in lunar orbit and will

study cosmic radio noise in the 0.02–13 MHz region. The satellite is a follow up to Explorer-38 which studied low frequency radio noise for four years after it was launched into Earth orbit in 1968. A lunar orbit was chosen for RAE-B because interference from radio noise from Earth saturated the receivers on Explorer-38 for between 25 and 40 per cent of its viewing time, and also solar activity after it was launched was greater than expected. The idea is that the Moon will shield the satellite from Earth radio noise, but the lunar orbit also has the advantage that lunar occultation can be used to pinpoint radio sources. The satellite, which cost \$8.6 million, is due to be launched from the Kennedy Space Center on June 9.

### TA in Commerce

THE Department of Commerce has set up a new Office of Technology Assessment and Forecast, chiefly to analyse and disseminate information contained in the files of the US Patent Office. A preliminary report published last week suggests that the premise underlying the new office's work is that changing trends in the patents filed at the Patent Office can be an accurate indicator of technological activity throughout the world. The office will thus seek to identify those areas of technology which have unusually rapid growth and also those areas in which a high proportion of patent activity originates outside the US. The idea will be to publish reports of patent activity in such fields. According to Dr Betsy Anker-Johnson, the new Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Science and Technology, other types of data, such as census reports and export and import figures, may be added to the system later. The office is being directed by Mr Alfred C. Marmor.

### NSF to the Rescue

The National Science Foundation has granted a stay of execution to the Space Radiation Effects Laboratory in Newport News, Virginia. A 600 MeV proton accelerator operated for NASA by William and Mary College's Virginia Associated Research Center, SREL, was due to be closed down on June 30 because of lack of money. NSF is to put up \$260,000 and William and Mary will put up another \$145,000 to keep the machine running for another year, because the NSF considers it to be "an important intermediate energy facility". The accelerator was built in the mid 1960s at a cost of \$15 million and it is used to simulate particle interactions in the Earth's outer atmosphere. The NSF grant only extends for a year, however, and in view of the failure of other accelerators to struggle on without federal grants, SREL's days are probably numbered.