

NEW WORLD

Advice of NIH Officials Ignored

by our Washington Correspondent

A SERIES of memoranda which surfaced last week on Capitol Hill provide a fascinating glimpse of executive infighting which preceded the recent cutbacks in funding for biomedical research. Written late last year by Dr Robert Q. Marston, then Director of the National Institutes of Health, and Dr Frank J. Rauscher, Jun., Director of the National Cancer Institute, the memoranda show that the advice of top NIH officials was completely ignored by the Office of Management and Budget, and they also bear witness to the strong, independent stand taken by Dr Marston before he was fired as NIH director in January.

The memoranda were made public by Senator Mike Mansfield, the Senate Majority Leader, and Senator Warren G. Magnuson, chairman of the appropriations subcommittee which deals with the NIH budget. In releasing them, the two senators are clearly marking out the battle lines for yet another struggle between Congress and the Administration over the size of the budget for the Department of Health, Education and Welfare—four times in the past four years Congress has passed HEW appropriations bills which President Nixon has vetoed because he considered them to be inflationary, and it is likely that the same thing will happen again this year.

Late last year, when it became clear that federal expenditure was greatly outstripping revenues, President Nixon instructed the OMB to cut back on expenditures in order to head off a tax increase. The National Institutes of Health were particularly hard hit by the squeeze, for the OMB proposed to apply the knife not only to planned expenditures in the 1974 budget, which was then in the final stages of preparation, but also to 1973 expenditures. The proposal was to reduce the budgets of all the institutes except for the National Cancer Institute (NCI) and the National Heart and Lung Institute (NHLI), both of which were too politically sensitive to cut, and to eliminate entirely the NIH training and fellowship programmes.

When that proposal was put to Dr Marston, he fired off a memorandum to the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare deploring the cuts and suggesting that "the President should be made aware of the long-range impact that this will have to the health of the Nation". The memorandum, dated December 19, pointed out that Marston had previously expressed concern that increases in the budgets of NCI and

NHLI were being made at the expense of other institutes, and added that the final OMB proposals "would mean a program over a two-year period from fiscal year 1972 to fiscal year 1974 where cancer increases by \$127 million, heart increases by \$23 million and the rest of biomedical research *decreases* by \$111 million — this, in spite of assurances that the highly political and visible programs would not grow at the expense of basic programs". As for training programmes, Marston acknowledged in the memorandum that they had been axed by OMB in spite of opposition from NIH officials and from the Secretary of HEW.

In spite of the fact that the National Cancer Institute escaped from the budgetary squeeze with an increase of funds, however, it is clear from two memoranda written by Dr Rauscher that the institute suffered badly from OMB's knife. NCI officials originally put in a budget request for the 1974 fiscal year of \$640 million, with the objective of increasing the cancer research budget to \$1,000 million over the next few years. Clearly, the \$640 million was an opening bid in the negotiations between NCI and OMB, and NCI officials knew that they would not get everything they wanted. But they were not expecting the request to be trimmed to \$500 million, which eventually happened.

Asked in November to highlight the consequences if NCI's budget request were cut from \$640 million to \$456 or \$550 million, Rauscher said in a memorandum to OMB that "a signifi-

cant decrease from the \$640 million, which we have requested for 1974, will seriously limit NCI's ability to carry out the objectives the Executive and members of Congress have so often enunciated". Among the consequences of a budget of \$550 million that Rauscher lists in the memorandum are restriction of the "expansion of immunologic treatment of cancer into clinical trials", at least a year's delay in letting industrial contracts to produce automated screening of Pap tests, "instead of introducing 8 to 10 new antitumour agents into general medical practice, at best we could introduce only 5 or 6", efforts to develop less hazardous cigarettes would have to be cut back or terminated, plans to expand cancer research at Fort Detrick "cannot be implemented", and "a deep cut would be necessary in the construction program in order to preclude major reductions in the ongoing program of competing renewal and new grants". In the event, however, OMB ignored Rauscher's plea and cut the NCI budget request to \$500 million.

Congress has not yet completed action on the 1974 budget for the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, but it is already clear that it will greatly increase the Administration's request. The House of Representatives, for example, has passed an appropriations bill that is some \$1,800 million greater than President Nixon requested, and to judge by the comments made by Magnuson last week, the Senate is likely to follow suite. Clearly, the HEW budget is again destined to become a political football.

FUNDING

No Money Yet

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CONGRESS adjourned last week without completing action on any major appropriations bills affecting science and technology. But at least NASA and the National Science Foundation can be reasonably certain of how much money Congress is willing to give them, for the Appropriations Bill, allotting funds to those two agencies, has now been passed by the House of Representatives and will probably be taken up by the Senate early in September. There are still some minor disagreements to be sorted out on the Senate floor, but NASA is likely to end up with some \$3,002 million—\$13.9 million less than the Administration requested—and the National Science Foundation is likely

to get \$569.6 million—\$13 million less than the administration requested.

Those figures were contained in a conference report which settled differences in the Appropriations Bills passed earlier this year by the House of Representatives and the Senate. The House passed the conference report shortly before the adjournment, but the Senate did not act on it because it contains two controversial provisions, unrelated to the two science agencies, which require some debate. At least astronomers can be thankful for one thing—the conference report includes \$5 million for the Very Large Array Telescope System. Although that figure is only half of the original budget request, the House of Representatives had originally cut out all the money for the VLA and restoration of half the request will at least allow construction to start this year.