

Short Notes

Alaskan Oil

CONGRESSIONAL aides have hit upon a peculiarly effective technique of bringing controversial suggestions to public attention. It consists of burying them deep in reports almost as though they were not meant to be noticed. A striking demonstration of the effectiveness of the technique was provided last week when a single five-line paragraph in a 100-page report on oil pricing made headlines. The paragraph suggested that there are oil deposits off the southern coast of Alaska that may be as extensive as those on the North Slope, but that the oil companies are not interested in developing them, and that the Department of the Interior is attempting to conceal the extent of the deposits from public view.

Oil companies reacted vigorously to the allegations by suggesting that although there may be oil deposits there, test bores have failed to detect them, and spokesmen for the Department of the Interior have hotly denied the allegations, saying that no preliminary study of the extent of possible deposits in the Gulf of Alaska has yet been made. The Department of the Interior is, however, now studying seismic data it has bought from two oil companies that have surveyed the region. So far, two oil consortia have sunk test bores in the Gulf of Alaska, but both have been abandoned because of damage from heavy seas. One problem with the area is that even if there is oil in any quantity under the gulf, it would be very difficult to extract because of the notoriously bad weather.

House votes Cancer Bill

THE House of Representatives this week passed by a vote of 350 to 5 the bill sponsored by Paul G. Rogers designed to increase the funding for cancer research but to keep it within the National Institutes of Health. The bill now goes to a conference committee where it must be reconciled with a bill passed in July by the Senate designed to set up an independent agency called the Cancer Cure Agency. Although the bills represent a fundamentally different organizational structure for cancer research, both would greatly increase the funding—the House bill calls for \$1,500 million to be spent over the next three years, while the Senate bill asks only for such funding as necessary. Rogers said this week that he is confident the conference committee will agree to keep cancer research in NIH.

Water Pollution

ANY illusions about there being no votes in sewage were quickly shattered last week when it became known that the White House is actively lobbying to have Senator Edmund Muskie's water pollution control bill changed during its passage through the House of Representatives. The bill, which was recently passed by the Senate by a vote of 85-0, calls for a rigorous programme to make all waterways in the United States fit to swim in by the year 1985. A central part of the bill is that responsibility for setting and enforcing water quality standards should be transferred from the states to the federal government. It now seems that the White House is trying to give the states some of their authority back. A redraft of the Senate bill is said to have been sent out to state governors to enlist their support, and to demonstrate to them the White House's concern for their interests. Another aspect of the bill that has caused concern is its cost both to the government and to private industry, and the prospects of a White House-industry coalition do not augur well for the chances that the bill will remain intact during its passage through the rest of the Congressional mill.

DES

THE tide of opposition to the use of the synthetic hormone diethylstilboestrol in cattle feeds gained considerable strength last week. The hormone, which is used to promote growth in cattle, has been under attack since it was reported in the *New England Journal of Medicine* earlier this year that the mothers of 13 girls who developed an extremely rare cancer of the vagina had taken the drug to prevent miscarriage. Since then, there has been a suit filed in the district court to ban the hormone from cattle feeds, Senator William Proxmire has introduced a bill into the Senate, designed to bring about the same end, and experts of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization have spoken out against its use. The Food and Drug Administration has finally been persuaded to act—last week it proposed a labelling change that would warn doctors not to prescribe the hormone to pregnant women.

While this furore has been going on, however, it has been reported that DES is an effective contraceptive agent if taken within 72 hours of intercourse.

AEC

THE Atomic Energy Commission's new regulatory procedures and its new-found attention to environmental and safety factors outlined recently by its chairman James R. Schlesinger, are causing administrative upheavals within the AEC. Chief changes are the creation of a new deputy directorship for reactor

licensing and the temporary drafting of 30 professional staff to the regulatory division from other parts of the agency. The AEC is now busy sorting through all the petitions from the power industry showing why their plants should not be shut down or construction stopped, while an environmental review takes place.

New Head for NSF

THE nomination of Dr H. Guyford Stever as director of the National Science Foundation, announced this week by President Nixon, brings to the NSF a man who is well versed in the workings of Washington's scientific establishment. Dr Stever, who will succeed Dr William D. McElroy as director of the NSF on February 1, 1972, is a member of the National Science Board and the advisory panel to the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Science and Astronautics. He has also been Chief Scientist to the Air Force, Chairman of the President's Commission on Patent Systems and a member of several federal scientific advisory committees on science and astronautics. Dr Stever is now president of Carnegie Mellon University, a position he has held for the past six years.

A physicist by training, Dr Stever is an expert on aeronautical and space engineering. He received his AB degree from Colgate University and his PhD from California Institute of Technology and was a member of the Faculty of MIT for 20 years before his appointment as president of Carnegie Mellon University. Between 1942 and 1945 he served in the Office of Scientific Research and Development in London. During his time at Carnegie Mellon University, the establishment has undergone some substantial changes including the merger between Carnegie Tech and Mellon Institute which formed the basis of the present university, and it was also one of the first institutions to receive an NSF science development grant.

Dr Stever comes to the foundation at a critical time in its history. For one thing the past year has seen a tug of war between the Administration and Congress over the NSF's programme of research applied to national needs and its support of graduate education. Although the relative funding for the programmes will be worked out during Dr McElroy's directorship, Dr Stever must justify the foundation's budget to Congress next year.