

which simulate those likely to be encountered on actual space flights, for which purpose steps have been taken to provide testing facilities which simulate a vacuum. The outstanding problems are the corrosion of fuel elements storage of liquid hydrogen fuel. The effect of the committee's generosity towards the AEC (which the Administration may yet decline to accept) is that it will be possible to move more quickly with the conversion of the present reactor rocket engine into one which can be flown in a rocket, probably first of all in 1977.

The committee's view of the future of the civilian power programme is also optimistic, although tinged with some anxiety occasioned by the slackening of orders for nuclear power reactors after the boom years of 1966 and 1967 and by the difficulty of finding sites

for new nuclear power plants in the face of public scepticism. In total, the committee recommends that the AEC request for \$223.5 million should be increased by \$10.3 million, mostly in the power reactor field (ships, after the Savannah, are being given no attention). The committee is particularly anxious that the AEC should push ahead with liquid metal fast breeder reactors, and appears to be satisfied that enough work is being done in this direction. Five manufacturers are at work on different designs for a 1,000 MW electric plant. The joint committee has also patted on the back the molten salt reactor experiments at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, although the extra \$3 million which it would allocate to this part of the programme is not enough to restore the AEC's original request for funds from the Administration.

Is Congress Mr Nixon's Keeper?

THE new Administration seems to be unable to keep out of trouble in its dealings with Congress on behalf of science, but it is not entirely to blame. The most recent trouble consists of a repetition of the habitual parsimony of the House Appropriations Committee towards the National Science Foundation. After the hearings held before the authorization committee (the House Committee on Science and Astronautics) in March, it seemed likely that the foundation would be able to enjoy once more a reasonable approximation between its needs and its capacities. In the event, however, the Appropriations Committee reduced the budget request from \$500 million to \$418 million, and this was the amount eventually agreed in the Bill passed by the House of Representatives at the end of last week. Even with the \$20 million carried over from the fiscal year just ended, the result is that the NSF will have less to spend than two years ago. The only hope now is that the Senate will take such a different view of the NSF's request that there will have to be a compromise. In any case, however, it is unlikely that the cuts will be fully restored and, indeed, it is most probable that the House recommendation will prevail as it did in 1968.

In the immediate future, the chief result of the decision will be continued short commons in the universities, and the committee's action is bound to suggest the possibility of reprisals against the universities. In the longer term, however, the most powerful consequence of another year of deprivation may be to impede moves for a reorganization of the machinery of federal support for academic science in the United States along lines such as those suggested by the National Science Board earlier this year.

Other troubles of the new administration in the past week are self-inflicted wounds. The case of the appointment of a new Assistant Secretary of Health and Scientific Affairs (with responsibility for NIH among other things) in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare seems to have been designed almost deliberately as a repetition of the fiasco in which Dr Edward Long was not in the end made director of the National Science Foundation. Some weeks ago it became known that the new Secretary at HEW, Mr Robert Finch, was anxious for the President to

nominate Dr John H. Knowles, director of the Massachusetts General Hospital, to this important post. Eventually it became clear that Dr Knowles was not the favourite candidate of the American Medical Association, and in what seems to have been a concession to pressure mounting in Congress in support of the AMA, the Administration caved in exactly a week ago. As consolation, Harvard University at the same time announced that Dr Knowles had been appointed Professor of Medicine, putting out a statement which probably explains why he eventually proved to be too much for the Administration. The university acknowledged, evidently with pride, that Dr Knowles is "one of the staunchest defenders and the severest critics of the American hospital" and went on to explain how he initiated a study which last year questioned the involvement of American hospitals with existing plans for medical insurance.

The new candidate for the HEW post turns out to be Dr Roger E. Egeberg, dean of the Medical School in the University of Southern California. Ironically, Dr Egeberg has also been active in urging causes not especially dear to the AMA—medicare, for example. Although this appointment has yet to be confirmed, the Administration is plainly hoping that it will be lucky second time.

The position as head of the NSF has also been filled with a man not sharply different from Dr Long in his opinions on matters such as the ABM, although it does appear that Dr William D. McElroy, the head of the biology department at Johns Hopkins University, has been more concerned with university than political affairs in his long career at the university. He is 52 and has taught at Johns Hopkins for 26 years. It is likely that Congress will confirm his appointment, and that he will take over at the National Science Foundation almost immediately.

It has also been announced that the new director of the National Bureau of Standards, who will succeed Dr Allen V. Astin at the end of August, is Dr Lewis M. Branscomb, for the past eight years the head of the Astrophysics Division of the National Bureau of Standards in Boulder, Colorado. Apart from his work in astrophysics, Dr Branscomb has a distinguished record of public service on government committees.