

academic research in nuclear and high energy physics should be transferred to some other body such as the National Science Foundation.

Dr Glenn T. Seaborg, chairman of the AEC at least until the beginning of September, when his present term expires, seems fairly confident that things are satisfactory enough as they are at present organized. In an interview last week, he said if responsibility for research in high energy and nuclear physics were transferred to a body such as the National Science Foundation, it would also be necessary to transfer the AEC's managerial competence in the management of large laboratories for high energy physics such as the National Accelerator Laboratory now being built at Batavia, Illinois. He did not think that situating the responsibility for high energy physics within the National Science Foundation would necessarily remove difficulties such as that which has arisen this year about the Princeton-Pennsylvania accelerator, now being denied further federal support (see *Nature*, **225**, 898; 1970), apparently because of the need to finance the Batavia accelerator out of a fixed pool.

On the development of nuclear power, Dr Seaborg sees a long development programme ahead. Although work has begun on the construction of two prototype liquid metal cooled fast breeder reactors he did not think these would become commercially operational until the mid-eighties, and he argued that the apparent lag of the United States programme behind that in Britain and other European countries was not a serious matter. He considers that the United States fast reactors may be commercially viable devices as soon as those being developed elsewhere.

#### ENVIRONMENT

### Simplified Committee Structure

THERE is now a good prospect that Congressional consideration of matters affecting the environment will be simplified by the setting up of a joint committee of the House of Representatives and the Senate to deal with environmental matters. A resolution to this effect was introduced into the Senate by Senator E. Muskie on June 5 and, by all accounts, is likely to have an easy passage through the congressional committees which must now consider how to respond to this proposal. According to Senator Muskie's scheme, the new committee would be known as the Joint Committee on the Environment and would include eleven members from each house. For obvious reasons, the appointments to the new committee would be intended to provide representation for Senate and House committees which at present are concerned with environmental matters—on recent showing pretty well every congressional committee in existence.

It has been clear for some time that Congress was in danger of making a muddle of its involvement with environmental problems. In the past few months, much of the running in this field has been made by committees such as the subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Commerce and by the Public Works Committee. Important issues such as the siting of nuclear power stations have, however, been the prerogative of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, one of the most jealous of all these institutions. At

the same time, committees such as the Daddario subcommittee of the House Committee on Science and Astronautics have joined the throng of such bodies by taking to heart the broad issue called technology assessment. In the weeks ahead, support for the proposal to set up a joint committee on the environment will depend on the success with which these vested interests can be persuaded to divest themselves of day-to-day interest. In the long run, the power of the putative committee will depend on the arrangements made for determining the budget of the proposed environmental agency, now likely formally to be sent to Congress by the beginning of July.

#### WEATHER MODIFICATION

### Restraints on Rainmakers

A PROPOSAL that organizations outside the federal government attempting to change the weather should make a public declaration of their activities is contained in a bill introduced in the Senate last week by Senator Warren G. Magnuson. The proposed legislation, which has the blessing of the Secretary of Commerce, Mr Maurice Stans, would appoint the Secretary of Commerce as the officer of the federal government responsible for compiling records of attempts at weather modification, not merely by commercial organizations but by state and local governments as well. The matter is obviously of some importance in that a system of monitoring attempts at weather modification would be a necessary starting point for the regulation of such procedures if in due course they turn out to be satisfactory.

Responsibility for coordinating weather modification research lay with the National Science Foundation until September 1, 1968. In the process of reorganizing the NSF legislation, however, the power to compel non-federal agencies to report attempts at weather modification was taken from the National Science Foundation and, since then, the government has formally lacked this power. Senator Magnuson said last week, in introducing his bill, that the legislation was needed because activity in weather modification could affect public welfare and also weather modification research projects now under way, and also because it is important to keep a record of all releases of atmospheric pollution. In practice, of course, the Weather Bureau, a dependant of the Department of Commerce, will be saddled with day-to-day responsibility.

#### OIL POLLUTION

### Shutdown Off Santa Barbara

THE most permanent consequence of the oil spill off the Californian coast at Santa Barbara a year ago is likely to be a more or less indefinite moratorium on the exploitation of the petroleum reserves there. Last week, President Nixon introduced a proposal to buy back from the oil companies the right to exploit submarine oil reserves in the Santa Barbara Channel in an area to the south-east of the point at which the operations of the Union Oil Company spilled crude