

## CONSERVATION

**Axe Falls on Hickel**

by our Washington Correspondent

CONSERVATIONISTS lost one of their firmest friends in the Administration last week with the summary firing of Secretary of the Interior, Walter J. Hickel. Mr Hickel, a former governor of Alaska who campaigned effectively for President Nixon in the 1968 elections, was sacked on the eve of Thanksgiving, and six of his closest aides at the Department of the Interior followed him the next day.

Mr Hickel's departure has been only a matter of time ever since his leaked letter at the period of the Kent State shootings in May which criticized President Nixon for being out of touch with students. The strong constituency he quickly built up with conservationists may be one of the factors that have delayed his dismissal until now. Mr Hickel became Secretary of the Interior two years ago to the bitter opposition of the conservationist lobby and after personally humiliating hearings before the Senate Interior committee. Having made his fortune in real estate and construction in Alaska, Mr Hickel seemed unlikely to be sympathetic to environmental issues, an impression borne out by some of his remarks at the time. He had no obvious qualifications for the Interior post and President Nixon's campaign pledge to appoint a Western governor seemed to be the chief factor behind his elevation.

Shortly after he took up office, Mr Hickel must have seen the light about ecology, or at least realized that preservation of the environment was the political rallying cry of the future. With the sudden zeal of the converted, he proceeded to confound his former foes and friends by deciding a number of important issues in a manner quite contrary to what each was expecting of him. After the blow-out at the Union Oil well in the Santa Barbara channel, a few weeks after his appointment, Mr Hickel ordered a cessation of offshore drilling operations in the region and a moratorium on new leaseings until stricter regulations had been developed. He had the Chevron Oil company prosecuted when its oil well in the Gulf of Mexico ran out of control in March this year and more recently he instigated suits against companies polluting public waters with mercury effluents.

Mr Hickel's final act in office was his announcement last week that the United States would import no more products made of whale and that eight species of whale—the fin, sei and sperm (these are the main commercial species) together with the bowhead, blue humpback, white and grey whales—were to be placed on the list of endangered animals. Insofar as the United States imports nearly a third of the world's whale products, this decision should be of some help in saving whales from extinction.

Had Mr Hickel stayed in office three days longer, his views on the Alaska pipeline would have been known. The proposed pipeline, which would carry oil from the North Slope strikes down to the ice-free port of Valdez on Alaska's southern coast, has been opposed by conservationists on the basis that if built underground the heat of the oil would melt the permanently frozen soil, causing erosion, earth slides, and the destruction of the fragile tundra, while if built above ground the pipeline would obstruct the migration

paths of the caribou. The oil companies involved on the North Slope have already bought some 600 miles of pipe.

A decision on the pipeline—there are also native land claims and a conservationist injunction to be settled before any construction can begin—will now be delayed until after Mr Hickel's successor has taken office in the new year. He is Mr Rogers C. B. Morton, a Representative from Maryland now serving his fifth term and chairman of the Republican National Committee. Mr Morton holds no particular record as saviour of the environment but is said to be much devoted to fishing. On a recent rating prepared by the League of Conservation Voters in which Representatives were scored for their voting record on ten environmental issues, Mr Morton unfortunately received minus 14 points out of a maximum of plus 28 (pro-environment) and a minimum of minus 28 (anti-environment).

## RESEARCH FUNDING

**Mansfield Champions Science**

by our Washington Correspondent

A STRONG statement in favour of keeping the national research effort at least up to its present strength was made by Senator Mike Mansfield, the Majority Leader, during the Senate debate on appropriations for the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Senator Mansfield, author of the now defunct amendment that restricted the Pentagon's research to matters with obvious military relevance, said in the Senate debate on November 20 that "for the Federal Government to act in a responsible manner, the civilian Federal agencies that sponsor basic research should have their budgets increased at least by an amount deducted from the Department of Defense. In fact, the amounts should also reflect the loss of the research purchased because of inflation".

Commenting on the bill's provision for research at the National Institutes of Health—the recommendation is for a \$129 million or 12 per cent increase over the sum requested by President Nixon—Senator Mansfield said he believed these additional sums were "perfect examples of money well spent and the re-allocation of resources through the civilian sector which might otherwise have been channelled through the Defense Department. I would hope that the additional moneys recommended by our committee and earlier by the House of Representatives will be expended so that the great pressures on the research community in this country will be alleviated". Final action on the bill depends on reconciliation of the House and Senate versions, both of which include considerably more for medical research than requested by the Administration. Only the Senate version, however, includes provision of \$15 million for the conversion of the biological warfare facilities at Fort Detrick to civilian use.