requires that if a project involves the possibility of serious ecological damage, it must be proved to fulfil an enormous need. He charges that the AEC's environmental policy statement does not provide such evidence, and that will be the basis of the committee's court action.

The most likely possibility for stopping the test rests, however, in its political repercussions. For one thing, it could seriously damage the chances of success in the SALT talks, which according to recent reports are progressing along hopeful lines. It has been suggested, for example, that the United States has proposed verbally, and will later propose in writing, an agreement that would halt the construction of both land-based and sea-based missiles, and also that as many as 300 missiles would be allowed in the US and the USSR to protect offensive missile sites. For President Nixon to cancel the Cannikin test would therefore help to establish his credibility in his desire to curb the arms race.

But a more immediate factor is the Presidential elections in 1972. Now that the possible consequences of the Cannikin blast have been aired in the press and in Congress, Nixon could well put off the test until after the 1972 campaign. If he in fact decided to go ahead on schedule, and an unlikely catastrophe did take place, his chances of re-election could be ruined. Some observers are very optimistic about the chances of a Presidential veto, and one critic of the programme suggested last week that the chances are "fifty-fifty or better". Another but less likely possibility is that the appropriations for the test could be deleted when they come up for debate in Congress. Senator Gravel is likely to oppose them in the Senate, and he will probably get more support than he did last week when he proposed an amendment to the Authorizations Bill seeking to delay the test until after May 31, 1972. That amendment was defeated by a vote of 37 to 57, but with more exposure in the press, and if the SALT talks continue to progress towards a moratorium on the construction of nuclear weapons, Gravel may be able to muster enough votes, if not to defeat the appropriations outright, at least to provide Nixon with added justification for vetoing the measure.

FDA

New Name, Old Face

by our Washington Correspondent

If the Administration gets its way with Congress, the name of the Food and Drug Administration may soon be deleted from the list of Federal agencies, and in its place will be sub-

stituted the much more grandiose title of the Consumer Safety Administration. But this exercise in semantics will do little to appease the many critics of the way the FDA conducts its business, for instead of radical changes in the functioning of the FDA, what is being proposed is that it should have extra responsibilities grafted on to its present unsatisfactory structure. The proposal, in the form of a bill introduced into the Senate by the Administration, came under scrutiny by the Senate Commerce Committee last week, and it has also been given President Nixon's personal blessing.

The idea is that the FDA will cease to be solely a watchdog over food and drugs and that instead its responsibilities should extend over the whole field of product safety. This proposal was spelt out in some detail by Elliot L. Richardson, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, before the Commerce Committee last week. He said that when the bill is passed, "I propose to build upon the FDA framework by establishing a new Consumer Safety Administration to be composed of three major offices: the Office of Product Safety Regulation, the Office of Drug Regulation and the Office of Food Regulation." And, in a letter to Senator Frank E. Moss of Utah, chairman of the subcommittee considering the bill, Nixon left no doubt about the fact that the FDA will continue to operate in much its present form. After announcing his approval for the bill, the letter went on to say that "this unit (the proposed Consumer Safety Administration) will build upon the activities, personnel and facilities of the FDA, which has a long and distinguished history in the field of consumer safety".

The Administration's bill is a counter proposal to a bill introduced by Senator Moss and Senator Warren G. Magnuson which also seeks to extend the Federal Government's responsibility for the control of potentially dangerous consumer products (such as toys that are likely to cause actual bodily harm), but the essential difference between the two proposals is that the Moss-Magnuson bill seeks to set up a division of product safety outside the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. The chief idea behind such a measure is that the new agency could respond more readily to consumer interests if it were taken out of the bureaucracy of HEW, and it stems from a report published by the National Commission on Product Safety. Testifying before the Senate Committee on Commerce last week, David Elkind, Chairman of the National Commission on Product Safety, left no doubts about his dislike for the Administration proposal, calling the proposed Consumer Safety

Administration a "paper tiger". Elkind said "the first step in creating a paralytic consumer protection function is to place it deep in the recesses of the already overburdened and unsuccessful Department of Health, Education and Welfare".

Why has the Administration chosen to oppose the Moss-Magnuson bill? Apart from the fact that to set up a unit outside the FDA may be regarded as the first step in dismantling the agency, the overt reason is one of administrative neatness. Richardson, for example, said that the FDA already has extensive laboratory and testing facilities, and that to set up a separate organization outside HEW may duplicate some of those facilities. He dismissed the idea, moreover, that an independent agency would be more receptive to consumer pressures than an expanded FDA, and came close to agreeing with critics of the FDA when he suggested, "I do not think that independent regulatory agencies have historically shown a greater resistance than other agencies to the pressures that often cause agencies to identify their interests with those of the industries they regulate".

If the Commerce Committee eventually decides not to go along with the Administration, but to support the Moss-Magnuson bill, the FDA would find itself in an embarrassing position, for Richardson confessed to the committee in reply to a question from Moss that he has already set up a division of product safety within the FDA, and Dr Charles Edwards, Commissioner of the FDA, later explained that in three to five years' time the Office of Product Safety would be the largest division of the FDA. He suggested that \$19 million would be spent on setting up the new office in 1972, and that some of this money would be taken from the already undernourished and overburdened food and drugs offices.

According to Edwards, the new style FDA will parallel the Environmental Protection Agency in terms of function of operation, but Elkind was quick to point out that the essential difference between the two agencies is that the FDA will continue to operate from within the bureaucracy of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, while the EPA was set up as an independent agency for the very reasons that the National Commission on Product Safety asked for an independent Consumer Safety Agency. The Administration's bill, he retorted, would "be as though the government were to fashion, like Dr Frankenstein, a man with beautiful sinews, long arms and piercing eyes, with just one weakness—an inability to hear from the consumer and respond to his needs".