

NEW WORLD

Drug Addiction

from our Washington Correspondent

FOR the past seven months, the Special Action Office for Drug Abuse Prevention, a key element in President Nixon's much publicized war against drug abuse, has been uncertain of its future. Set up in June, 1971, the office has been waiting for the Congressional mill to grind out legislation that will not only formally recognize the office as part of the executive, but which will also set down the terms under which it will operate. But at last it seems that Congress is nearing the end of its deliberations, for both chambers have now unanimously passed bills that will give the office legal existence, and, although many important aspects of the office's operations are yet to be decided, it is already clear that Congress is not willing to hand over to the director of the Special Action Office the full powers that President Nixon originally asked for.

What is also clear is that public concern about drug addiction and political pressures for quick and easy solutions to the problem will make considerably more money available for research in all fields connected with drugtaking. The actual sums of money likely to be voted by Congress, and how they are to be spent, must await the results of a conference committee which will soon meet to sort out differences between the bills passed by the Senate and the House of Representatives.

When the conference committee does meet to strike a compromise on the bills, it will have a difficult task on its hands. On the one side there is a \$1,700 million extravaganza voted by the Senate for a five-year programme weighted heavily towards helping the states to combat drug addiction within their own borders, while on the other there is the more modest programme agreed on last week by the House of Representatives, which asks for \$421 million to be spent over three years on new programmes to be coordinated by the Special Action Office. What is chiefly at stake is the extent of the programmes over which the Special Action Office will have jurisdiction; less in doubt is how the office will exercise its power, for the bills are in relative harmony on that aspect.

When Mr Nixon first sent the legislation to Congress to set up the Special Action Office, he asked that the director be given such extraordinary powers that Congress could hardly fail to curb them. What was suggested was

that the director of the office should be able to control the budgets of each agency concerned with rehabilitation of drug addicts and with research and education on drug addiction, even to the extent of withholding money appropriated by Congress and transferring funds from one agency to another. The bills passed by Congress have, however, divested the director of the power to transfer money and he will also be unable to operate programmes directly from the White House. But he would still be left with a sizeable stick with which to beat federal drug programmes into a co-ordinated approach to rehabilitation and education.

Both bills would give the director of the Special Action Office the same power over drug abuse rehabilitation and education programmes as the Office of Management and Budget now wields. But his actions would be more open to Congressional monitoring than those of the Office of Management and Budget, for the House bill, at least, specifically required that a report be submitted to Congress each year, and that the director be available for questioning by committees.

But even those slightly blunted powers can be expected to raise some departmental jealousies, for established administrators of drug rehabilitation programmes will naturally take unkindly to the type of control that the director of the Special Action Office can wield from the White House. The jealousy was perhaps best phrased by Olin E. Teague, a Representative from Texas, during the debate on the House bill last week. Teague, who is chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, tried to keep the Veterans' Administration from being organized by the Special Action Office by offering an amendment designed to keep the drug programmes of the VA under the control of the Office of Management and Budget. In a three-sentence opening speech on the amendment, Teague told his colleagues all this amendment does "is to prevent Dr Jaffe (Nixon's nominee as director of the Special Action Office) from being the dictator over the Veterans' Administration's drug program". The amendment failed by the close margin of 174 to 196.

Apart from agreement over the fact that the Special Action Office should be established, and how it should exercise its powers, however, there is little in common between the bills passed by the House and by the Senate. The

House bill, for example, seeks to appoint a 15-member National Advisory Council for Drug Abuse Prevention, to advise the director of the Special Action Office on his functions and to recommend programmes which it feels could usefully be adopted by the federal government.

The Senate bill, on the other hand, seeks to establish a Strategy Council, charged with the responsibility of drawing up longer term plans for federal efforts designed to curb drug abuse, and with evaluating present drug programmes.

What the House bill does is essentially to set up the Special Action Office in the White House and give it the power to direct and control existing drug abuse programmes that are not related to law enforcement, while the Senate bill seeks to add on to that basis a number of new programmes and initiatives. Nearly all the additions are the work of Senator Edward M. Kennedy's Health Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, and they open the way for another conference committee tussle between Kennedy's subcommittee members and members of the Public Health and Environment Subcommittee chaired by Paul G. Rogers, chief architect of the bill passed last week by the House of Representatives.

The additions to the Senate bill include the setting up of a National Institute on Drug Abuse within the National Institute of Mental Health, to draw together the work of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare in the field of drug abuse, the establishment of a programme for giving grants to help states to set up their own drug abuse treatment and prevention plans, and a \$1,300 million plan to give project grants for all sorts of activities in the drug abuse field.

While the outcome of the conference committee's deliberations is difficult to predict, because the two bills are so different in scope, it is probably safe to say that whatever happens at the conference table, the funding authorized for research into drug addiction, including projects aimed at finding an effective agent to block the craving for a drug, will be considerably increased. The budget request for the 1973 fiscal year submitted by President Nixon to Congress recently calls for expenditure of \$49 million on narcotic research, while the House bill calls for an extra \$20 million on top of that; the Senate plan also contains provision for considerable funding.