

NEW WORLD

Kennedy Bill Gains

by our Washington Correspondent

THE outlook for Senator Edward M. Kennedy's proposed National Science Policy and Priorities Act has brightened considerably. Kennedy's bill, which is one of the most far-reaching pieces of legislation on scientific matters to come before Congress for many years, has been passed unanimously by the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare. And, on the other side of Capitol Hill, the bill was introduced into the House of Representatives a few days before Congress broke up for the Democratic convention by Mr John Davis, chairman of the subcommittee on Science, Research and Development.

Kennedy's bill would put the National Science Foundation squarely into the business of funding applied research, and would fundamentally change the federal pattern of research support. The bill would give the foundation some \$1,800 million to spend over the next three years on research into urban problems—health care delivery, waste disposal and mass transportation—as well as for retraining scientists and engineers thrown out of work by cutbacks on expenditure on defence and space. (See *Nature*, 237, 306; 1972 for a fuller discussion of the bill.) It is now expected to be brought before the Senate in August, but its passage through the rest of the Congressional mill hinges on what happens in the House of Representatives and on how long Congress stays in session before the November elections.

Backers of the bill are elated by the fact that all seven Republicans on the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare supported it last week in spite of some vigorous lobbying by the Administration. Another indication of the bill's prospects in the Senate is the fact that it is attracting co-sponsors like a magnet—an aide to Senator Kennedy estimated last week that it will have picked up about 40 backers by the time it reaches the Senate floor. And the election could also give the bill a favourable wind.

The prospects in the House of Representatives are, however, much less clear. For one thing, a companion to Kennedy's original version of the bill—a more modest proposal which did not contain the provisions for research into urban problems—was introduced into the House more than a year ago and has since been languishing in Mr Davis's subcommittee.

After extensive hearings a year ago, the subcommittee lost interest in the bill and it dropped out of sight. Until Davis's action last week, it therefore seemed likely that the subcommittee would be content to sit on the bill, at least during election year; but much will now depend on whether the subcommittee will reopen hearings on the new version or simply approve it and send it to the full Committee on Science and Astronautics.

It is something of a surprise that a bill that would have such a considerable impact on science policy has so far excited so little interest. The Administration is opposed to it on the grounds that it would involve the National Science Foundation in projects which belong to the mission agencies. The National Science Foundation is also quietly worried about the prospects of a shift of its centre of gravity away from basic science—its traditional constituency—and about the suitability of its grants procedure for supporting applied research projects. Yet the Administration may be embarrassed, especially in an election year, in opposing a bill that would focus science and technology on domestic problems.

NIH

Support from the Senate

by our Washington Correspondent

SHORTLY before starting its short recess for the Democratic Convention, the Senate provided yet more evidence of the power of the biomedical research bandwagon in the United States. It voted to give the research institutes of the National Institutes of Health some \$1,900 million to spend in the 1973 fiscal year (which started on July 1)—\$319.5 million more than the Administration requested and \$176.7 million more than the House of Representatives allocated. Although the final amount that Congress will vote for the NIH must now be decided by a conference committee, there is no doubt that the National Institutes of Health will get much more money than they asked for. In comparison, the National Science Foundation, which has had its budget slashed by just over \$20 million (see *Nature*, 237, 423; 1972), seems particularly hard done by.

Almost every institute in the NIH complex is destined for a large budget increase if the Senate gets its way, but the chief beneficiary is the National

Heart and Lung Institute. The Senate has agreed to add \$94.7 million to the Administration's request for the NHLI, which would give the institute \$350 million to spend during the coming year. The figure, which is \$50 million more than the House of Representatives has voted, is based chiefly on the fact that diseases of the heart and lungs are the number one killers in the United States.

As for the National Cancer Institute, the Senate has agreed with the House of Representatives on a figure of \$492.2 million—\$60 million more than the Administration asked for. Even the Administration's budget would have given the National Cancer Institute some \$50 million more than it received for the 1972 fiscal year. And the Senate has also followed the lead of the House in appropriating huge increases for health manpower, particularly for the construction of new medical schools.

ASTRONOMY

Tight Job Market

by our Washington Correspondent

ASTRONOMERS are now feeling the discomforts of a tight job market and are joining other groups of scientists in the unemployment queues. The origin of their troubles is familiar—universities have expanded their astronomy departments in recent years, but as the production was cranked up to produce its maximum output, federal funding for astronomy slacked off. While two thirds of those coming out of the universities in 1967 with a PhD in astronomy could count on choosing between two or three job offers, those graduating now are happy to get a single offer. Moreover, during the past few years there has been a marked shift in the pattern of employment among new PhDs. In 1967, educational institutions soaked up 80 per cent of the crop of PhDs, but by 1970 the proportion had dropped to 37 per cent—a sign that teaching posts have now become saturated.

To see what could be done about the situation, the American Astronomical Society established a manpower and employment committee in August 1971. The committee's report (*Guidelines for Employment Opportunities in Astronomy*, available from Mr H. M. Gurin, 211 FitzRandolph Road, Princeton, NJ 08540), suggests that this year the number of new PhDs matches almost exactly the number of available jobs.