

## NEW WORLD

## Kennedy Floats Some Radical Changes

by our Washington Correspondent

SENATOR EDWARD M. KENNEDY'S National Science Policy and Priorities Act swept through the Senate last week with barely a ripple of interest expressed by the newspapers. The lack of public interest in the bill, however, belies its importance, for if passed by the House of Representatives—where its future is at best uncertain—it will lead to a fundamental shift in the activities of the National Science Foundation and cause a major change in science policy planning in Washington (see *Nature*, 237, 306; 1972).

Designed to increase federal expenditure on science and technology directed towards solving domestic problems, the bill did not, however, survive its passage through the Senate entirely unscathed. An amendment proposed by Senator Peter Dominick and reluctantly accepted by Senator Kennedy axed the total expenditure proposed in the bill from \$1,800 million, spread over three years, to \$1,025 million. But Kennedy and his supporters did manage to defeat other amendments which would have weakened the bill, and it was finally passed by an impressive margin of 70 votes to 8, in spite of opposition from the Administration.

A central purpose of the bill is the establishment within the National Science Foundation of a Civil Science Systems Administration, which would support research and development into all kinds of urban problems such as health care delivery, transportation and pollution. Another part of the bill seeks to give the National Science Foundation authority for retraining scientists and engineers thrown out of work by cut-backs in defence spending. If passed by the House of Representatives, signed by President Nixon and fully funded—all of which are doubtful—the bill would add helpings of \$150 million, \$375 million and \$500 million to the foundation's plate in 1973, 1974 and 1975 respectively.

The Administration is unhappy about the bill for several reasons, chief of which is that it would involve the National Science Foundation in all kinds of applied research and development that is at present the responsibility of mission oriented agencies, and it would take the foundation even further from its original mission of supporting basic research. The large expenditures involved are also viewed with some concern in the White House. But under-

lying the Administration's attitude is the fact that it has itself been working for the past year on ways to stimulate utilitarian research and development, and it is naturally chary of having its thunder stolen in election year by a Democratic-sponsored measure.



Senator Edward M. Kennedy

All of these arguments surfaced during the debate on the bill in the Senate, chiefly through Senator Dominick, who called the bill unnecessary, but nevertheless voted for it. Dominick pointed to the fact that the Administration has increased expenditure on domestic science and technology by 65 per cent between 1969 and 1973, expanded the

problem-related research activities of the National Science Foundation and set in motion a number of conversion programmes for out of work scientists. "In short," he said, "there are numerous programs, both legislative and administrative, which focus on the same problems [as the Kennedy bill]". He also raised the question of the NSF's responsibilities under the bill overlapping with those of other agencies and expressed concern that the proposed Civil Science Systems Administration would duplicate work being carried out elsewhere.

Specifically, Senator Dominick took exception to two of the general principles outlined in the preamble to the bill and tried unsuccessfully to have them deleted. The two principles, which are among the most far-reaching items in the bill, are that expenditure on science should grow at least as fast as the Gross National Product and that expenditures on civilian research and development should be increased until they reach at least parity with defence research and engineering.

Dominick argued that GNP is not a measure of real growth, and that it would be unrealistic to tie research and development expenditures to it. Moreover, he suggested that it is the duty of the appropriations committees to determine expenditure levels, and such a provision would interfere with their work. As for increasing expenditure on civilian research until it reaches parity with defence spending, he pointed out that "the level of defense spending gives no indication of the optimum level of civilian research and development spending". Kennedy emphasized the need for some guaranteed increase in civilian research spending by pointing out that the proposed 1973 budget for federal expenditures on science and technology is 16 per cent below what it was in 1967 in real terms, and Dominick's amendment was defeated by 46 votes to 35.

Senator Dominick did, however, succeed in getting significant reductions in the funding proposed in the bill, chiefly for the Civil Science Systems Administration, which ended up with \$795 million in the final version of the bill, compared with \$1,200 million in Kennedy's version, and the retraining and conversion programmes which are set to receive \$200 million instead of the \$560 million proposed in the original version. Kennedy accepted these cuts reluctantly on the basis of a behind the scenes trade off in which Dominick withdrew a proposal to delete from the

## CONGRESS

## Critic with an Axe

A RESHUFFLE within the Senate Appropriations Committee following the death of Allen J. Ellender, former chairman of the committee, has given Senator William Proxmire the chairmanship of the subcommittee which deals with the budgets of NASA and the National Science Foundation. Together with the companion subcommittee in the House of Representatives, it is one of the most important committees dealing with science budgets. Senator Proxmire has for long been an ardent critic of some of NASA's programmes, particularly the shuttle, and his appointment has not been greeted with enthusiasm in the agency which he will oversee.