

DES in feed could result in an unwarranted public concern and an unjustified increase in meat prices".

Mr L. H. Fountain, chairman of the subcommittee on Intergovernmental Relations, which oversees the work of the FDA, was not satisfied and asked the General Accounting Office for its opinion on the legality of delaying the ban. A letter signed by R. F. Keller, Acting Comptroller General of the United States, which was received by Fountain last week, concluded that Dr Edwards has no legal authority for delaying a ban on a food additive which is found to cause cancer in animals. Under the terms of the food and drug act, Edwards has the power only to withdraw the licence for such an additive, and the practical consequences of such a ban are immaterial to the law. The GAO therefore believes that Dr Edwards has acted illegally in not bringing the ban into effect immediately. So far, the FDA is not offering any comment on the letter, except to say that it is under study.

If the FDA is forced to take DES off the market immediately, and also has no power to grant a stay of execution on other food additives, there is likely to be an increase in the clamour for compensation from the food and drug industry. Already Congress is considering a bill which would provide compensation to food manufacturers caught with large stocks of cyclamates when the FDA took the sweetener off the market in 1969, and a heated debate

is taking place over the merits of such a handout.

The food industry claims that the ban came without warning and caused large losses, while opponents of the bill point out that doubts were raised about cyclamates as early as the 1950s and yet the food industry increased the use of the sweetener from 5 million to 17 million pounds in the 1960s. The argument therefore is that the food industry has only itself to blame for the large stocks of the sweetener that it was caught with when the ban came into effect. The bill to bail the industry out was passed by the House of Representatives earlier this year and it is now being considered by the Senate Judiciary Committee. Pesticide manufacturers are also watching the bill's progress closely because they have also been financially affected by government bans on hazardous chemicals.

NIH

A Quick Trim

by our Washington Correspondent

THE House Appropriations Committee has trimmed some \$935 million off the appropriations bill for the Departments of Labour and Health, Education and Welfare that President Nixon vetoed last month (see *Nature*, 238, 428; 1972). Among the agencies to which the appropriations committee has been forced to apply the knife is the National Institutes

of Health, whose budget has now been fixed at \$2,497 million, compared with \$2,724 million in the vetoed bill. Of this sum, \$1,705 million is earmarked for the research institutes (as opposed to administration, health manpower, overseas expenditure and buildings), compared with \$1,794 million in the original bill. Nevertheless, even under the revised bill, the research institutes would end up with about \$229 million more than they received last year and \$125 million more than the Administration asked for.

As for individual institutes, \$7.5 million has been trimmed from the vetoed budget for the National Cancer Institute, and \$25.6 million from that for the National Heart and Lung Institute. Both are still set to receive much more than President Nixon requested, however, although the funding falls short of the amounts contained in the much publicized bills calling for a crusade against cancer and cardiovascular diseases which Congress has passed recently.

Although the revised appropriations bill would entail nearly \$1,000 million less expenditure than the vetoed bill, it is still some \$836 million more than President Nixon requested. In view of the fact that President Nixon said in his veto message that he would not be satisfied unless Congress reduces the overall spending to a level very close to his original request, there is a possibility that he may cast a second veto if the Appropriations committee's revised bill survives the rest of the Congressional mill unchanged. The Senate Appropriations committee has not yet reported its revised bill, although it will probably stick fairly closely to the lead given by the House, and there seems little prospect that the bills will be radically altered when they come up for debate. If President Nixon does cast a second veto, however, backers of the new bill are confident that they can muster sufficient votes in the House of Representatives to override it.

Short Note

Prostate Cancer

The National Cancer Institute has awarded contracts worth \$622,800 for research into cancer of the prostate. The disease, which is the third most frequent cause of death from cancer among males in the United States, is little understood and there have been suggestions that its study has been relatively neglected. The studies funded by the contracts will be aimed at finding a valid animal model for the disease in man, and also at understanding the metabolism of the prostate under normal and cancerous conditions.

CONGRESS

Another Chairman Unseated

by our Washington Correspondent

WAYNE N. Aspinall, the powerful chairman of the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, was defeated in a primary election in Colorado last week, thereby losing the right to seek re-election to the House of Representatives as a Democratic candidate in November. Aspinall, whose chairmanship of the interior committee makes him one of the most influential members of Congress on matters dealing with resource development and the environment, has come under spirited attack by environmentalists in the past few years and this played a large part in his defeat. He has often been criticized, for example, for supporting economic development of resources, particularly the construction of dams, at the expense of the environment—a philosophy no doubt coloured by the fact that for his 24 years in Congress Aspinall

has represented a district containing mining, logging and ranching interests. Earlier this year, a Washington based environmental organization called Environmental Action placed Aspinall on a list of "Dirty Dozen" congressmen who, according to the organization, have particularly poor voting records on environmental issues.

First elected to the House of Representatives in 1948, the 76-year-old Congressman has ruled the Interior committee for 12 years; he is also a long serving member of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy and chairman of its subcommittee on Raw Materials. Next in line for chairmanship of the interior committee is James A. Haley of Florida, who is only three years younger than Aspinall. The victor in the primary election last week was Dr Alan Merson, a professor of law at the University of Denver.