

NEW WORLD

Cancer Advisory Board Expresses Concern

by our Washington Correspondent

THE National Cancer Advisory Board, the chief advisory body to the National Cancer Institute, last week sharply criticized the Administration's plans to phase out NIH training grants and fellowships, and appealed directly to President Nixon to get them reinstated. Specifically, the board passed a resolution during its regular quarterly meeting requesting the President's Cancer Panel — a panel consisting of three members which reports directly to the President — to "seek a personal audience with the President" to bring the Board's concern to his attention.

The Administration's budget request for 1974 proposes that NIH training grants should be phased out, and provides no money for approving new grants. Only those grants which still have some time to run will be funded, and so eventually, if the Administration gets its way, the NIH will be forced entirely out of the business of giving direct support to graduate students.

The Administration supports its case by arguing that since research budgets are now "stabilized", demand for manpower will not grow as quickly as it has in the past few years, and there is danger of an oversupply of trained biologists. It has also been argued that since scientists who hold a PhD expect to earn large salaries, they should be able to finance their training by taking loans.

But the Administration's plans have been attacked vehemently by university scientists, who have complained that phasing out the training grants will choke off the supply of graduate students. Dr James Watson, Professor of Molecular Biology at Harvard and Director of the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, recently told the Senate Health Subcommittee, for example, that the policy is "lunacy". He pointed out that most important new discoveries in biology come from people under the age of 35 who are relatively unknown at the time they make their breakthrough, and so the shutting off of NIH training grants and fellowships, coupled with the trend towards contract research, will concentrate resources in the hands of middle aged entrepreneurs. Also the science will for the most part have to be done "by an age group not noted for working into the night".

Watson's statements to the Senate Health Subcommittee were also backed by Dr Lewis Thomas, Dean of Yale University School of Medicine and

President-elect of the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. Both Watson and Thomas are, however, university scientists who represent the group most severely affected by the cutbacks. They could, therefore, be accused of special pleading. But earlier this week, the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, in a report on the job outlook for graduates, reported that prospects are bright for graduates entering the health care professions, and also warned against any cutbacks in federal funds for training in health and allied professions.

CONGRESS

New Force in the Senate

by our Washington Correspondent

WHILE the Administration has been scrapping, revamping and—some say—downgrading its science policy machinery, Congress has been quietly building up its scientific strength. The latest move is the setting up of a subcommittee on Science, Technology and Commerce as part of the Senate Commerce Committee. Although the subcommittee's role is still being worked out, it has a broad mandate to study scientific and technological questions, and it seems that its work will to some extent parallel that of John Davis's subcommittee on Science, Research and Development in the House of Representatives.

The chairman of the new subcommittee is Senator John Tunney of California, and other members so far appointed are Adlai Stevenson III of Illinois and James Pearson from Kansas. Both Tunney and Stevenson were appointed to the Commerce Committee for the first time this year. It will be the first subcommittee in the Senate to have such a wide-ranging interest in science since the demise in 1969 of Senator Fred Harris's subcommittee on government research.

One of the subcommittee's chief concerns will be the workings of the National Bureau of Standards, which is part of the Department of Commerce, and in that respect it will handle all the legislation dealing with metric conversion. Fire safety research and development will also fall in the committee's purview. But Senator Warren G. Magnuson, chairman of the Commerce Committee, clearly sees the subcommittee as having a broader role than simply overseeing the affairs of the NBS, for he said last week that it would be concerned with the "taming and channel-

ling of technology towards the solution of national problems". An aide to Senator Tunney added that the subcommittee will also probably take a close look at investment in science and technology in relation to the US balance of payments.

Started in 1946, the NIH training and fellowship programmes grew steadily until last year, when the funding reached nearly \$190 million. This year, funding is being held at \$150 million, and it is set to go down next year to \$129 million. Moreover, general research support for every institute except the National Cancer Institute and the National Heart and Lung Institute is also set to decline, which in turn will mean that there will be less money available in the universities to support graduate students from the general project support grants.

An important factor is that Senator Tunney is a close personal and political friend of Senator Edward M. Kennedy, and cooperation between his subcommittee and Kennedy's subcommittee, which oversees the work of the National Science Foundation, is therefore to be expected. Such cooperation would, for example, facilitate any move to broaden Kennedy's National Science Policy and Priorities Act (S32) to provide a role for the National Bureau of Standards. In the House of Representatives, such jurisdictional problems would not arise because Davis's subcommittee has oversight over both the NSF and the National Bureau of Standards.

Congress's other new science unit, the Office of Technology Assessment, is still waiting for funds before it can officially get under way. A supplemental appropriations bill is not now expected to be passed until June or July at the earliest, and so appointment of staff and the initiation of studies will have to wait until the summer or autumn. There has also been a minor squabble among the members of the OTA board of directors appointed from the House of Representatives, about who should be the board's vice-chairman. Kennedy has already been elected chairman, and John Davis reckons that he should get the job of vice-chairman. But Charles Mosher, a Republican from Ohio and ranking minority member on Davis's subcommittee, reckons the job should go to a Republican, namely himself. And that is where the matter stood last week. The OTA board meets for the first time next week, and the office's advisory council may then be appointed.