

ENVIRONMENT

Environmental Protection

by our Washington Correspondent

THE House Appropriations Committee has handed both the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Academy of Sciences a political hot potato which could prove embarrassing. The committee passed a bill which includes \$5 million for the EPA to let a contract with the academy to carry out a massive study of the EPA's programmes and past decisions. That provision was eventually passed by the House of Representatives and the Senate, and it was signed into law at the end of last month. If the academy agrees to accept the contract, it will undertake one of the biggest and most difficult studies it has ever been involved with, and it will also run the risk of being used by hostile Congressmen as a weapon in their campaign to emasculate the EPA.

The appropriations bill itself carries the bare statement that \$5 million be provided for the academy to study the EPA, but the House appropriations committee report spells out the nature of the study in some detail. The committee suggests that the study should involve an estimate of the costs of pollution abatement over the next 10 years and that it should include an analysis of the costs and benefits of the pollution control programme—an analysis which should bring in social and economic factors.

The committee also propose that the academy be given the task of examining the costs and benefits of automobile emissions controls, the extent to which environmental regulations have contributed to the energy crisis, and the effect on agricultural productivity of various decisions to ban pesticides. Virtually every one of those topics has already been the subject of intensive study and heated debate, and there are many who find it difficult to see what new insight the academy might be able to bring to the matter.

Why was the provision put into the bill? The answer, in short, is that the EPA is unfortunate enough to have its budget scrutinised by the agriculture subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee, and many powerful members of the subcommittee, being closely allied with farming interests, regard the EPA with about as much affection as they do the boll weevil. The chairman of the subcommittee, Jamie Whitten, a conservative Democrat from Mississippi, makes no attempt to conceal his contempt for the EPA. Last week he told the House of Representatives that the agency has contribu-

ted to the energy crisis, increased the costs of food production, increased the danger to human health by banning DDT, and put American agriculture at a competitive disadvantage.

Thus the committee is looking to the academy to provide intellectual support for its complaints about the EPA, which is an unenviable position for the academy and for the EPA to be placed in.

SOUTH EAST ASIA

North Vietnam Appeal

by our Washington Correspondent

THE Scientists' Institute for Public Information (SIPI), a public interest organisation, has launched an appeal in the scientific community for help in repairing some of the destruction caused by US bombs, herbicides, shells and other weapons in Southeast Asia. The immediate goal is to establish a Research Institute for Agricultural Botany in North Vietnam—a project which has been specifically requested by North Vietnamese scientists to help revegetate rural areas which are extensively littered with bomb craters.

According to Dr Barry Commoner, past president of SIPI, the appeal will serve the dual purpose of alerting US scientists to the post-war situation in North Vietnam and of informing the US public of the need to provide aid to all of Indochina. This is a promise which in fact was made by President Nixon during the cease-fire negotiations but which has since fallen into political disfavour.

The idea for the agricultural research institute stems from a visit to North Vietnam made in July this year by two American scientists with the support of SIPI. Dr E. W. Pfeiffer, a zoologist from the University of Montana, and Dr Arthur Westing, a botanist from Windham College, Vermont, returned with reports of devastation on a scale which Dr Westing said last week was "almost unbelievable". He said that they were rarely out of sight of bomb craters, even in the most rural areas of North Vietnam, and since more than 90% of the population is directly engaged in agriculture, Dr Westing pointed out that the greatest need for aid lies in rehabilitating the rural areas.

The SIPI appeal started this week with a letter sent by Dr Commoner and Dr Arthur Galston, professor of botany at Yale University, to some 10,000 scientists asking for aid in establishing the research institute, for scientific books and journals to be sent to North Vietnamese scientists and for equipment for the institute. Dr Galston said last week that \$100,000 will be enough to start the institute off, and that SIPI is hoping to get some of the money from

institutions and foundations. He reckons that sufficient cash and equipment should be available by April 1974 to send a small team of US scientists to North Vietnam to work in the research institute. In addition, SIPI has arranged to ship scientific books and journals to South Vietnam by way of Dr Philip Harvey, of St Stephen's Hospital in London.

OTA

Daddario Appointed

MR EMILIO Q. DADDARIO has, as expected, been appointed the first director of Congress's new Office of Technology Assessment. The appointment puts Daddario in charge of a body which he is largely responsible for setting up, and brings him back to Capitol Hill three years after he left the House of Representatives to make an unsuccessful bid for the governorship of Connecticut.

A lawyer by training, Daddario was elected to Congress in 1958, and in 1963 he became the first chairman of the subcommittee on Science, Research and Development. Under his stewardship, the subcommittee rapidly established itself as the focal point for discussion of science and technology policy issues in Congress. It also rather grotesquely revamped the National Science Foundation by making its top officials direct Presidential appointments and enabled the NSF to sponsor applied research. The subcommittee began hearings on research into environmental problems before the environmental bandwagon had even begun to move, and drew up the legislation which eventually led to the establishment of the Office of Technology Assessment.

Daddario's appointment was confirmed when the OTA board met early in November—its first meeting since the office finally got some funds to begin work (see *Nature*, 246, 6; 1973). Next step is to appoint a deputy director and an advisory council. The most likely candidate for deputy director is Daniel V. Simone, a former member of the defunct Office of Science and Technology, who is now on the staff of the NSF's Office of Science and Technology Policy. There should be little problem in finding good staff for the OTA—some 3,500 people have applied for jobs there, even though none has been formally advertised.