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Energy Efficient

Energy Secretary Hazel R. O'Leary, who is slated for the guillotine by the House Republican budget-cutters, illustrates the old adage that "no good deed goes unpunished."

No Cabinet officer has run a department more efficiently. Her first move, to disclose that the government had conducted radiation experiments on humans, took the young White House staff by surprise, but the public loved it. She was in the thick of the fight for the extension of the nuclear test ban, going up against some heavy hitters in the defense community. She has negotiated with Russia on dismantling their nukes. She visited India and Pakistan and got raves from both. She helped in the successful bargaining on the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

She has changed the culture of the Department of Energy from fortress to human work place. She goes through the corridors sprinkling hi's and thanks. She took elocution lessons and addresses meetings like Phil Donahue, with mike in hand.

In spite of all this—or possibly because of it—House Republican budget-cutters have put out a contract on O'Leary. She is philosophical. "It's ideological, I think," she says. She expects help from Vice President Gore, an old disarmament buff, but from the White House she will settle for "permission to fight the good fight alone." She has submitted her own plan for downsizing DOE.

The House Budget Committee has several schemes for dismantling her empire. One would create a new department of science at a cost of \$46 billion; another would disperse its major functions to other agencies. Republicans would like to get the nukes out of the hands of an independent woman who has surrounded herself with environmentalists and turn the problem of nuclear cleanup over to Defense Secretary of Defense William J. Perry has already advised Congress that he doesn't want to add to his duties and thinks the wall between civilian and military supervision of nukes should be maintained.

Twenty members of Congress have written to Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-Calif.), chairman of the subcommittee on military procurement, to protest his proposed billion-dollar cut in cleanup funds. Members with nuclear waste dumps in their districts urged the chairman to restore the full \$6.6 billion request.

O'Leary started her week with an expedition to a District high school in down-at-the-heels Anacostia. She was

trying to show the good fallout from the government mania for downsizing. In the name of the department she presented six District public schools with more than a million dollars worth of surplus security equipment.

O'Leary, in a powder blue power suit, swept into H.D. Woodson High School, murmuring ruefully that the heavy-metal gift was "an important commentary on where we are." District schools are floundering badly, not so much for want of money as for lack of direction and motivation. Violence has ripped through them like lightning. Eastern High School, which takes pride in its academic record and its prize-winning choir and band, was the scene of a shooting last year. Cardozo, which once stood for the quality of the Supreme Court justice for which it was named, had a murder.

Woodson has no tragic history. Students still fight only with their fists, according to its principal, Lucile Christian, who says the school may look like a prison, but is not. She is pushing for more emphasis on conflict resolution courses for her 1,600 students. D.C. School Superintendent Franklin L. Smith explained that Woodson was chosen to put the focus "on the donation, not the problem."

The energy secretary stood near a sign that said, "All males please remove your hats on entering the building" and another that called Woodson "the tower of power." She explained that children have the right to go to school without fear. Characteristically, she has plunged into the "partnership" between the federal and D.C. governments, has given out computers and other learning tools. This is a concept embraced much more by House Speaker Newt Gingrich than President Clinton, who shies away from entangling alliances with D.C. Mayor Marion Barry, a notoriously erratic character.

O'Leary held a little informal rap session with students on her way out the door, and asked them if they wanted people—Energy has a rich potential in math and science tutors—or equipment. The president of the student body, Angel Williamson, said she would take it under advisement.

The secretary then resumed her struggle for survival. She is not without resources: A recent Harris poll showed that 64 percent of the public favors keeping the Department of Energy as it is. The lady has shown considerable capacity to take care of herself in the delicate and dangerous work she does. She muses that the Republicans may find it "too complicated" to dismantle her department just to "get a trophy for the mantel."