

By WALTER SULLIVAN

Emerging details of a plan by President Nixon to revamp the entire top echelon of the Federal science establishment show it to be the most fundamental reorganization of that machinery since it began developing a quarter of a century ago.

The projected changes, designed to become fully operational by July 1, mark the end of an era born of World War II and the cold war crises of the nineteen-fifties and nineteen-sixties. It was an era in which the rapid development of science and technology seemed vital to the nation's survival.

The changes reflect the President's determination to "streamline" the Federal bureaucracy and limit the number of officials and advisers with direct access to him. However the removal of science from the President's elbow to a "neighboring room" is regarded by many scientists as symbolic of a demotion of science.

They also note with alarm the heavy emphasis, in the new Federal budget made public Monday, on scientific and technological goals of immediate social importance, seemingly at the expense of the long-term quest for basic knowledge.

However, many of those interviewed yesterday, said it was difficult to assess the implications of the plan, good or bad, until it is put into effect.

While all details of the reorganization have not yet been announced, it is known that they call for the elimination of the President's Science Advisory Committee as well as the Office of Science and Technology within the Executive Office of the President.

The advisory role will pass to the director of the National Science Foundation, Dr. H. Guyford Stever, who will report to George P. Shultz in the latter's role as one of three "special assistants" to the President. Mr. Shultz is also Secretary of the Treasury and the chairman of the new Council on Economic Policy.

In interviews yesterday, some of the principal figures in these changes, as well as several former science advisers to the President, expressed their views as to the implications of the new plan.

Effect of Sputnik

They pointed out that the President's Science Advisory Committee was elevated to the White House level in 1957, a few weeks after the launching of the first Sputnik shocked the nation into fears of Soviet technical superiority.

The Office of Science and Technology, providing a staff for support and extension of the advisory group's role, was set up in 1962, a year after the Soviet Union put the first man in earth orbit.

Three former science advisers to the President, although with different political allegiances, agreed yesterday that Mr. Nixon's plan was not unexpected as a manifestation of

his goal of streamlining the Federal bureaucracy.

For the last four years, said Dr. Jerome B. Wiesner, who was science adviser to President Kennedy, the science advisory machine in the White House "has been more a facade than a reality."

"One cannot argue very hard against dismemberment of a facade," Dr. Wiesner added. But, he said, it is "unfortunate that this downgrading of science occurs when the role of science and technology is being questioned generally," a role that he feels is still vital to the nation.

Dr. Lee A. DuBridge, who was President Nixon's first science adviser, said that "times have changed radically." The National Science Foundation, he added, is now capable of performing the role originally conceived for it as focal agency of the Federal effort in science.

In the first years following its formation in 1950, its budget never exceeded \$1-million and, Dr. DuBridge said, Dr. Alan Waterman, the N.S.F. director, had urged that a separate agency be formed to perform a coordinative role at the top level of government. This became the Office of Science and Technology.

Now the foundation has a budget of over half a billion dollars and, as its director, Dr. Stever, said yesterday, a staff capable of taking on much of the role performed by the O.S.T.

However, Dr. DuBridge said he could not deny an "emotional sadness" at the demise of the apparatus that he headed early in the first Nixon Administration.

Abolition of Post

Dr. Edward E. David Jr., the last science adviser, who resigned earlier this month, said he had supported the overhaul embodied in the President's plan. His resignation, Dr. David said, was submitted with the knowledge that the post was to be abolished.

He declined to comment on reports that he turned down the proffered chairmanship of the Atomic Energy Commission on the ground that the A.E.C. was fated to become part of an agency responsible for all energy sources.

However Dr. David said two and a half years in Washington "was enough" and he wished to return to industry. He is now with Gould, Inc., a Chicago manufacturer of electronics, engine parts and other products.

A major concern has been fear that the specialist panels of the President's Science Advisory Committee, comprising some 200 of the nation's foremost experts in various fields, will be lost to the Government.

Dr. Stever said an Office of Science Policy would be established within N.S.F. to take over some of the responsibilities of the dismembered White House establishment. This office, as well as the National Science Board, which oversees N.S.F., would create their own consultative groups, presumably including some of those now on the White House panels.

Conflict of Interest Seen

One criticism of Dr. Stever's role, as both science adviser to the Government and head of one agency within that Government, has been a potential conflict of interest. How, it was asked, can he advise on the allocation of science funds to the various Government agencies when his own is a competitor for those funds.

This question, he said, was put to him by the National Science Board, and he replied that the same problem faced Mr. Shultz, who is Secretary of the Treasury as well as filling a higher role in the President's "super-Cabinet."

Mr. Shultz, he said, planned to abstain from decisions affecting Treasury and he planned to do likewise, so far as N.S.F. was concerned.

Asked about his remoteness from the President — one level lower than that of the previous science advisers — Dr. Stever said the distance was not important: "It's who listens that counts."

Dr. David estimates that he saw the President, apart from large meetings, no more than twice a month.

Dr. Stever expects Mr. Shultz to be more accessible. They are old friends, having known one another as young faculty members of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.