

As I View It From Washington

by Virgil Smirnow

National Affairs Editor

Washington

“WHO’S IN CHARGE HERE?” is the question being asked most frequently in the Nation’s Capital. President Carter makes an occasional leadership-type speech, but in general his leadership has been weak and ineffectual many observers have concluded. “He’s a one-termer,” one influential Senator commented recently, and that’s a view which is being expressed more and more, even by stalwart Democrats. The recent TV appeal to the public on the energy issue was really a public apology to the Congress because the President had been making some less than complimentary remarks about their lack of action on his energy package. “The real problem,” said the late Senator McClellan, “is that the man is an outsider. He doesn’t know how to work with Congress. He still thinks we’re the Georgia Legislature, and we’re not. Being an outsider was a great campaign gimmick, but that’s all it was good for—getting elected.” The Bert Lance affair didn’t help matters, both as far as the Congress was concerned and also in terms of public reaction. It’s possible that the answer to the question, “Who’s in charge here?” may be “Congress!” and that would be a startling turn of events.

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MC CLELLAN’S DEATH MAY HERALD A WHOLESAL CHANGE in the basic structure of the Congress. Scheduled to take McClellan’s seat as Chairman of the Powerful Senate Appropriations Committee is the liberal Warren Magnuson (Dem. Washington). “Maggie” is a staunch friend of health causes and a very solid legislator. His assumption of the key Appropriations Committee Chairmanship will mark the first time in many years that a Senator who is not a conservative and a Southerner has held that post. When Magnuson goes to the Appropriations Chairmanship, it will trigger a chain reaction of other Senate Committee changes which will spell the end of an era of control over key committees by long-tenure Southerners. It is an interesting irony that this change takes place during the administration of the first true Southern President since the Civil War. (Pardon us, LBJ.)

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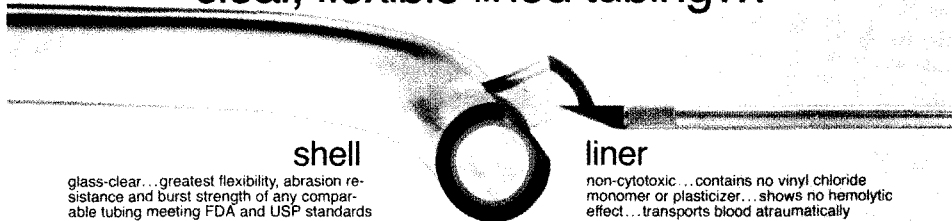
THE FDA IS GEARING UP TO DO ITS THING in medical devices review and control. But it has run into a snag. It doesn’t have the technical staff it needs to evaluate the devices it’s supposed to look at and pass on. A frenzied staff search is under way to find the people to do the job. Many of those ultimately retained for medical devices study will be per diem consultants who are employed elsewhere full-time. Although many will come from academic institutions, at least some will have to be recruited from the very business whose devices are to be studied. If you’re interested in joining the Federal payroll for this purpose, either full-time, part-time or on a consultant basis, get in touch with the Medical Devices Branch of the Food and Drug Administration here in Washington, D.C. But if you do, brace yourself for some red tape. After all, what would life in Washington be like if it weren’t for a little red tape now and then.

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A SMALL BUT INTENSE STORM WHIPPED UP OVER CATH LAB GUIDELINES when they were released by HEW. The guidelines specified that Cath Labs should be doing a minimum of 600 procedures a year in order to be qualified, or at least that's the way many area Health Planning Agencies interpreted the guidelines. That meant that Cath Labs in all but the major cities were going to have to go out of business. Cardiologists all over the country were hopping mad. HEW responded to complaints by saying that the guidelines were "meant to be something to be attained, not necessarily required." But many physicians felt that guidelines tend to become "law" in time or at least that planners frequently see them that way. Stay tuned for the next thrilling installment.

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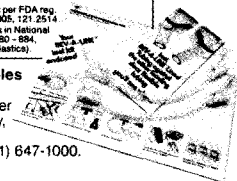
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