

Ferdie J. Deering

SEP 17 1981

# High-Tech Research Regains Steam

**B**USINESS spokesmen seem to be reluctant to admit that European nations and Japan have been pushing harder on technological research than this country. Nevertheless, American business is feeling the competition and indications are that something is being done about it.

"Despite the alarmed outcries in recent years that the United States is losing its technological vigor, there is growing evidence to the contrary," Business Week magazine asserted recently.

Nation's Business declared that Yankee ingenuity, inventiveness, and determination to break new ground is as good as ever, but cited opinions that our ability to translate new technology into specific new products and services is slipping badly.

A story in The Wall Street Journal began by stating that "More and more companies are climbing aboard the high-technology bandwagon, but most of them don't have the slightest idea how to manage their technology efforts effec-

tively."

The consensus seems to be that the United States not only has lagged somewhat in research and development but that we also have not been utilizing what we have to best advantage.

The reaction is an upswing in technological research that is running ahead of inflation as businesses and industries take a longer range view of innovation.

Probably one major reason for the slowdown in research was the overruling growth of government regulations in the 1960s and 1970s. Installations demanded by EPA, OSHA and other agencies may have diverted both attention and funds from potential research.

Legislation is pending in Congress to extend the 17-year life of a patent for products that require federal approval to compensate for the time it takes to get regulatory clearance.

Sponsors say that by the time the Food and Drug Administration has reviewed a patented new drug for safety and effectiveness less than 10 years remain in the average life of a

patent.

The administration also is calling for a 25 percent tax credit on increases in salaries and wages related to research.

What is business looking for in research? New products, as well as completely new ideas and new applications of existing ideas. For example, experiments in splicing of genes are being conducted by dozens of companies, many of which are new themselves.

Metallic glass that is as strong as steel, can be bent like metal, is non-corrosive, and can be produced cheaply is being studied by a number of industries for a variety of products and uses.

Production of electrical power with chemical generators called fuel cells, ways to make auto engines burn much of their own emissions, and development of more sophisticated robots to replace people in hazardous or simple jobs are other ideas being pushed.

Businesses that fail to move ahead soon may fall behind in competitive free enterprise.