The Senate report on recombinant DNA legislation, passed by the Senate this week, states the problems of regulatory development. as the Senate's bill and report, however, echoing Mr. Halvorson's position, would create an expensive, unneeded federal bureaucracy, it would create an 11-member national commission to assume responsibility for safety standards and licensing research facilities, instead of vesting the authority in the House. The Senate report estimates that the commission, its staff, and 50 federal inspectors of DNA facilities would cost $3.8 million in the first year of operation. The report contends that "H.E.W. is not the appropriate agency to regulate the research."

"It is in the interest of H.E.W. to finance much of it," he says. Mr. Halvorson says the Senate report—although better than a draft version—still suffers from a lack of attention to the hazards of the research.

Too Much Lay Authority

Mr. Halvorson notes that scientists have had too much experience with recombinant studies since the National Academy published a report (in 1971). He says the research thus far has shown that introduction of recombinant DNA molecules into host bacteria is not always the disease-causing properties of other bacteria, in every case.

The composition of the "local bureaucracy" that the Senate would create is not limited to those with no connection to the institution—although they could be representatives of one or more scientific groups. There would be no researchers or other employees of the National Academy.
A broad review of federal research and development expenditures will soon get started under the direction of Presidential Science and Technology Advisor Frank Press. His position and his staff in the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy got a new lease on life on July 15, when President Carter decided to retain an in-house science advisor. Press and his staff of 22 will provide support and direction for a panel of outsiders to review the "basic research of mission agencies" to make sure that the research is relevant. The Defense Dept.'s multibillion-dollar basic research program will be the first to be scrutinized. Other outside panels will review policy issues of interest to the chemical process industries, such as offshore drilling technology, disposal of radioactive wastes, threats to the ozone layer and patent policy. "The President is concerned about patent policy. He wants to know about the issues, particularly about the problems that stem from federally funded research and development," Press declares.

Despite reservations voiced by the pharmaceutical industry, the Food and Drug Administration is ordering brochures to be included with prescriptions for products containing estrogen. These would include birth-control pills used by an estimated 1 million women. The Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Assn. says the FDA order may confuse patients and raise unnecessary fears. But FDA says that all estrogen prescriptions filled after Sept. 21 must include the brochure, which would include warnings about possible side effects. Manufacturers would be required to include a warning against use of estrogen by patients suffering simple nervousness and depression during menopause, since the drug has not been shown to be effective for these purposes, FDA says.

The massive shift to burning fossil fuels to generate electricity could endanger the earth's atmosphere by creating a "greenhouse effect," according to a report issued last week by the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences. NRC-NAS predicts that carbon dioxide emissions from burning significantly greater amounts of coal could increase the temperature of the atmosphere by 6°C, enough to radically change the boundaries of crop-growing around the world and perhaps melting part of the polar ice caps. NRC-NAS has recommended a worldwide research program to identify any mitigating effects in the carbon cycle. NRC-NAS predicts that alternative energy might have to be brought onstream within 50 years to prevent "severe consequences."

Profound changes in the federal government's offshore oil and gas leasing system have been approved by the Senate. The Interior Dept. would be required to experiment with a variety of bidding systems and would conduct its own preliminary exploration of tracts to better determine potential production levels. Also, Interior would have the authority to investigate the production of existing domestic wells on its own instead of having to rely on information supplied by oil companies. Drilling companies would be responsible for up to $35 million in damages if a spill occurs. The House is expected to go along with several significant changes in present leasing policy.