Reid Out; Berle In

The excellent appointment of Peter A. A. Berle to succeed Ogden Reid as New York State's Commissioner of Environmental Conservation has spared Governor Carey the sharp criticism of those environmentalists who deplore Mr. Reid's departure under pressure. His administrative troubles—and he had his share—were not enough to warrant the loss to the state of an official whose devotion to the cause of an improved environment was strong and whose actions to advance that cause were vigorous and untiring.

In his fifteen months in office, Commissioner Reid has not been one to suffer bureaucrats gladly, particularly those he inherited or was obliged to take on for political reasons and who made no secret of their indifference to his environmental philosophy. In the light of his difficulties, his record of achievement looks all the more remarkable, including development of nine major environmental bills that all became law; the launching of a $2.7 billion sewage treatment program (the state's largest single job program); and the fight against General Electric's pollution of the Hudson River with PCB's.

Mr. Reid's conduct of the G.E. battle is believed to have been a source of friction between Governor Carey and himself. The company no longer denies that its activity has in fact poisoned the river with toxic chemicals; it agrees to stop, in prescribed stages, but asks that it not be held responsible for the river's restoration.

It should not, in fact, be held solely responsible—the Federal and state governments have been just as culpable for having allowed the deadly process to continue until Mr. Reid acted to stop it. But since the company's share in that culpability is unquestioned, requiring it to make partial restitution would be a historic precedent and one that Governor Carey should support and promote.

The Governor's choice of Mr. Berle, a man with unimpeachable credentials as an environmentalist—and a public servant of skill and integrity besides—is a hopeful sign that the Governor will do just that.

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Berle Named to Succeed Reid in Environment Post

By RICHARD SEVERO

Governor Carey yesterday designated Peter A. A. Berle, a former State Assemblyman and a "highly respected environmental lawyer, as State Commissioner of Environmental Conservation.

The Governor made his plans known quickly after receiving the resignation of Ogden R. Reid, who has held the post for the last 15 months. Mr. Reid's resignation becomes effective next Wednesday.

Mr. Berle will be Acting Commissioner when Mr. Reid steps down, since his appointment to the $47,800 a-year post is subject to confirmation by the State Senate.

The Governor accepted Mr. Reid's resignation "with regret" and the tone of his reply was conciliatory, although relations between the two men have not been good.

In his letter to Mr. Reid, Mr. Carey noted that "the past 16 months have been difficult for all of us who work for the quality of living and well-being of all the citizens of our State."

"Despite the enormous pressures facing you, you have provided my administration with strong policy leadership and significant achievement in the field of environmental conservation," Mr. Carey asserted.

Carey Displeased

The Governor is known to have been displeased about Mr. Reid's stance in the state's case against General Electric, which was found to have violated water-quality standards by discharging toxic PCB's — polychlorinated biphenyls—into the Hudson River from two plants north of Albany. Members of the Governor's staff also indicated that Mr. Carey had been displeased by administrative problems that came up during Mr. Reid's tenure.

Basically, the Governor let it be known that he favored a balancing of environmental and economic issues. Mr. Reid was known to be at odds with suggestions that such balancing might take the form of making major compromises to achieve an early settlement with General Electric.

Mr. Berle, 38 years old, a partner in the law firm of Berle, Butzel & Kass of New York City, has already informed the firm that his resignation from it would be effective next Wednesday, the day he assumes his duties in Albany.

"It is a large challenge," Mr. Berle said. "Environmental issues are perceived by many to raise a choice—that of environmental quality or jobs. I reject that formulation. I believe they are not mutually exclusive and I intend to see to it that environmental concerns are appreciated and achieved."

Mr. Berle indicated that his first order of business would be to "restore the faith of people working within D.E.C. in their own capacities to perform well, as well as to generate confidence from those outside the department."

Mr. Reid's resignation brought forth expressions of support for the way he saw environmental issues, both from his colleagues in government and from environmentalists.

'High Principle'

John Adams, director of the Natural Resources Defense Council, which provides lawyers for environmental fights all over the country, called Mr. Reid "a man of high principle whose instincts for the preservation of New York's environment were right on target."

"To lose a man of that caliber is sad," he asserted.

State Senator Bernard C. Smith, Republican of Northport, L. I., who is chairman of the Senate's Committee on Conservation, Recreation and the Environment, said: "I don't think there has ever been a guy with a deeper commitment to the environment than Mr. Reid."

And in Mr. Reid's home county of Westchester, Richard Knabel, vice president of the Federated Conservationists of Westchester County, a coalition of 75 groups, said that "pressures were brought to bear on Reid from inside and outside his office."

"It may or may not be a conspiracy, but he has certainly gotten the short end of the stick," he added.

Mr. Berle appeared to have strong support from within and without government. Senator Smith, who said he foresaw no major problems in Mr. Berle's confirmation, asserted that he thought Mr. Berle would have "a big job ahead of him in pulling loose ends together, but I think he has the knowledge and drive that would permit him to do an effective job."

Mr. Reid, who had indicated he would hold a news conference today to elaborate on his reasons for resigning at this time, canceled it, saying that he might meet with reporters "at a later date."



The New York Times/Boris Silverman

Peter A. A. Berle in his Manhattan office yesterday

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