

small to be picked up by any reasonable project." Goyan says he tried to explain this to a few of his nonscientist friends, without any great success. "Most of them are 'Tab' drinkers," he says.

Emmanuel Farber, who chaired the NAS panel, is even less convinced that the results are important or surprising. There have been negative epidemiological studies of cancer and smoking, he notes. Farber still recommends that saccharin be taken out of processed food and drink, as it has been in his native Canada. Frederick Robbins, who was chairman of the Institute of Medicine's food safety panel that also studied the saccharin question, says that the new studies are "in general, consistent with what we said all along."

But this is not how the new studies were generally reported in the press. "Saccharin Scare Debunked," proclaimed the *Washington Post* last month. "The evidence contrasts sharply with results from studies that have shown increased risk of cancer from animals," reported the *New York Times*. "Whatever saccharin does to rats, it does not after all appear to cause bladder cancer in humans," ran the verdict of the *New Scientist* of London.

Reports of this ilk shaped Congress's comprehension of the issue. The new epidemiological studies, says a staff member of the Senate subcommittee on health, "suggest that saccharin is not as strong a hazard as we originally thought." According to a staff member of the House subcommittee on health, the press accounts of the studies "confirmed the view of most members that they made the right decision" in imposing the 1977 2-year moratorium on the FDA's actions against the sweetener; "Frankly I don't think the members understand the results of these studies. They simply don't want to deal with saccharin any more, and not many will read past the headlines," this staff aide remarks.

At the FDA the attitude toward the saccharin affair is one almost of resignation. According to FDA Commissioner Goyan, "There is a 100-to-1 chance that the Senate will extend its moratorium on our proposal. So I don't intend to expend a great deal of effort explaining the latest studies to the American people." "Our credibility on this subject is diminished anyway—people wouldn't believe us," remarks FDA public affairs officer Wayne Pines. Goyan states that the FDA will prepare the ground more carefully next time it takes action to regulate a weak but popular carcinogen.

—R. JEFFREY SMITH

Controversial Scientist Considers Leaving NCI

Gio Gori, the government scientist who angered his superiors in 1978 by hinting publicly that it was tolerable to smoke low tar and nicotine cigarettes, is saying that he wants to leave government service because the directors of his agency, the National Cancer Institute (NCI), have made life difficult for him. He is actively considering a post as director of a new center to study health policy that will be endowed in part by the Brown and Williamson Tobacco Company.

The center will be affiliated with the Franklin Research Center, a nonprofit organization based in Philadelphia that does \$20 million worth of contract research for private clients and the federal government. The organization runs the federal Solar Heating and Cooling Center, for example, and is performing studies for the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health on the appropriate exposure levels for seven dangerous workplace conditions or chemical classes.

W. B. Ligett, director of the parent Franklin Institute, says the new health program will study "government and private health policies, particularly the cost-benefit ratio of these things—to see if federal money could be spent better some other way, or if it could be spent more efficiently." He says that contributions for the program's estimated \$3 million endowment are being solicited from the chemical, pharmaceutical, and petroleum industries, in addition to the tobacco firm. "The program will be 100 percent within the control of the Franklin Institute," he says, however.

In response to a reporter's call, Gori says he is considering three options at present, including two offers from the food industry. He says that things might also work out at NCI. "Left to my own devices, I would prefer to stay. But I have been forced to look around, so to speak. Life has been difficult for me here at NCI, since the smoking matter. I've had things taken away from me with no explanation. They just put you in a broom closet; it's a time-honored technique." But he also says, "The NCI has been good to me, and some of my best years have been

spent here. I don't want to go out slamming any doors, although the provocation is there. I have no resentment, and I'm not bitter."

Gori, who is presently NCI's deputy director of cancer cause and prevention, says that if he takes the post as director of the health center, he will push it to look at the costs of health prevention programs. He says that not enough people realize that prevention programs can impose indirect costs, a point of view that "many of my colleagues here are unhappy with."

Proxmire Reenters the Ring After Scientist Lands a Hit

Senator William Proxmire (D-Wis.) ate some crow at the behest of one research scientist on 24 March and 4 days later zinged another with one of his monthly "Golden Fleece" awards for the most ridiculous waste of the taxpayer's money.

The senator announced that he had settled a libel suit brought against him by Michigan research psychologist Ronald Hutchinson, by paying the scientist \$10,000 in addition to \$5,400 in court costs. Hutchinson filed his \$8 million lawsuit in 1976 after he received Proxmire's Golden Fleece and found his sources of research funds beginning to dry up. Proxmire gave Hutchinson the award for research on signs of aggressive behavior, which included studies of teeth-clenching in monkeys.

Proxmire did not flatly apologize in his statement on the Senate floor, but said that some of his statements about Hutchinson may be subject to an unintended interpretation. After correcting several factual errors, he said "my conclusions about Hutchinson's work are solely my own," noting that others had judged it meritorious. "My policy is not, nor will it be, to prejudge or censor any application for a federal grant," Proxmire said. Earlier, in a significant decision against Proxmire, the Supreme Court had decided that the senator's statements in press releases were not exempt from libel law, and that Hutchinson could sue under an easier standard of proof than Proxmire's attorneys had claimed. Proxmire's defense cost the Senate \$124,351.

Hutchinson says he is pleased with the settlement, even though it won't cover the cost of taking his case to the Supreme Court, estimated at \$50,000. "His opinion of my research was not the issue. The issue is that when a legislator describes another person, he must do it accurately." Hutchinson says that more than 3000 contributions from academics, government employees, and others have paid for half of his legal bill. "Everyone has been extremely generous," he says.

As to what became of the work that led to the award, Hutchinson says he has used it as the basis for more than 30 published articles. The Office of Naval Research, which paid for some of it, says, "At this time, the results have not been directly utilized by the Navy." A spokesman says that potentially the research will be used to help identify individuals with a high tolerance for aggressive stimulation, particularly those who might work in submarines and patrol planes. It will serve as "a baseline against which future research can be compared," the spokesman said.

On 27 March, Proxmire announced he was giving his latest Golden Fleece award to the National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH), which provided \$1325 to study "why bowlers, hockey fans, and pedestrians smile." The study, part of an ongoing \$75,000 NIMH contract with Robert Kraut of Cornell University, actually involved videotaping the smiles and rolls of some bowlers from behind a pin-setting mechanism. "While I have no objections to a study of smiling as such, involved here is a question of priorities. In this period of double-digit, galloping inflation, should the hard-pressed taxpayer be asked to pay for an academic version of Bowling for Dollars?"

NIMH responds that the study might be useful to therapists, teachers, policemen, judges, and political leaders in determining "the genuineness of peoples' messages." The agency also said that Proxmire's press release was worded so as to leave the impression that the entire contract was expended on this single study.

Proxmire, who is chairman of the Senate appropriations subcommittee that considers the NIMH budget, says, "I smilingly award my Golden Fleece of the Month . . . and I leave it to NIMH

to determine whether my smile is a deception, an emotional state, or a sign of friendliness."

SST Supporters Fly Above the Economic Fray

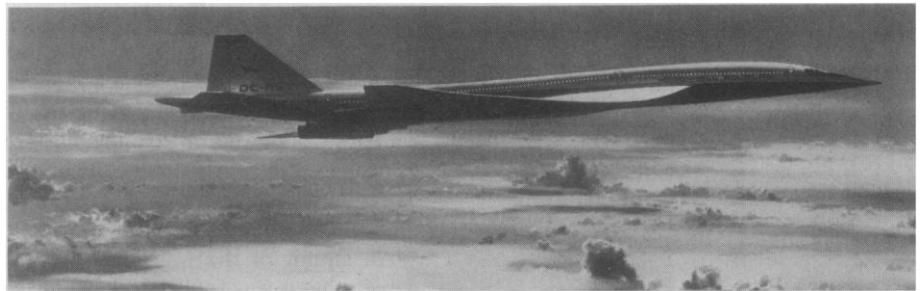
Supporters of an American supersonic transport (SST) aircraft are stirring once again after lying low for nearly a decade. The aerospace manufacturers and their backers in Congress have quietly asked that the National Aeronautic and Space Administration's (NASA) ongoing SST research effort be granted at least a fivefold increase in funding, so that the federal government can embark on a new SST construction program by the end of the decade.

This request was first made last year, but last week it received a major boost from the congressional Office of Technology Assessment (OTA),

projected subsonic aircraft. The previous American SST venture was killed by Congress in 1971 for similar cause.

Although most aircraft companies are searching for ways to cut their fuel bills by at least 20 percent, the SST envisioned by OTA will use between 50 and 100 percent more fuel per mile traveled than any other plane, cost the airlines 25 percent more, and necessitate passenger fares 20 to 30 percent above the most expensive first-class seat on a subsonic aircraft. Despite improvements in aerodynamic shape, engines, and construction materials, the SST as envisioned by OTA will cost \$1.25 billion (in 1979 dollars), as opposed to \$80 million for an existing SST, the British-French Concorde.

This unappealing balance sheet becomes an argument in the OTA report in favor of government support. No private corporation, says the report, could raise the \$6 billion to \$10 billion necessary for design, development, and start-up of the new SST, even



The latest in SST designs [NASA drawing]

which said an increase in NASA's research funds was necessary in order to "maintain the U.S. SST option." Support for the SST generic research program appears "appropriate," the agency said, largely because the United States would miss out on \$50 billion in potential sales between 1990 and 2010 if it decided not to pursue it. Current proposals call for boosting NASA's research funds from \$10 million annually to an amount between \$560 million and \$1.9 billion spread out over the next 8 years.

Though the overall OTA report recommends a greater research effort, the picture it paints of the SST's future is decidedly bleak in its details. Most important, the report concludes that despite the cost-saving advances in technology that will occur by 1990, the SST will remain considerably more expensive and less efficient than any

though the industry will benefit if the project ever breaks even. Consequently, the OTA suggests a domestic or international funding venture, similar perhaps to the Communications Satellite Corporation. There would still be other obstacles to overcome, however, such as environmental concerns and noise problems (*Science*, 14 March).

In lieu of taking OTA's advice, Congress could take its lesson from the example of the Concorde, which has been a big money-loser for its sponsors. Production lines were closed last September, with all of the planes sold at loss or given away to French and British state-owned companies. Concorde engineers purportedly failed to anticipate the high cost of fuel—an obstacle apparently yet to dissuade the contemporary SST enthusiasts.

R. Jeffrey Smith