

the weather satellite decision. And indeed, Baldrige has testified that Fiske had no policy-making authority in the matter.

Be that as it may, the Fiske revelation has definitely soured the weather satellite proposal in Congress. "It's not unimportant," says a key House staffer. "It has focused a lot of people's attention on the proposal. Congress, the public, the press are going to be very skeptical now."

"It's been clear to us for many months that the process that went on in the Administration over the last year was simply not rational," he adds. "There's a lot of backfilling going on now to make it look rational. When you look at the documents and how they have been edited, it seems that there was an effort to ignore or stifle contrary recommendations."

With the Fiske controversy now in the hands of the Justice Department, Representatives Harold Volkmer (D-Missouri) and James H. Scheuer (D-New York) are planning to move into substantive hearings on the satellite transfer in mid-June, with the emphasis actually on a parallel issue that has been obscured by the weather satellite controversy: the proposed sale of Landsat.—**M. MITCHELL WALDROP**

## The Party Is Over for French Science

The bubble has burst—officially—for French science. The first 2 years in power of the socialist government of President François Mitterrand saw an unprecedented growth in the science budget, largely due to the efforts of Mitterrand's first research minister, Jean-Pierre Chevènement, who resigned over political disagreements with the government's economic policy in February. Now it looks as if, falling back in line with other European nations, the growth in the research budget for 1983 will be merely sufficient to keep pace with inflation.

As part of a general package of austerity measures introduced to meet the nation's deteriorating economic situation, Chevènement's successor as Minister of Industry and Research, Laurent Fabius, announced last week a reduction of 12.5 percent in that part of the previously

announced budget of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) which is spent directly on research grants and backup support for CNRS laboratories and those it finances in universities.

CNRS will not cut back on commitments to increase the number of scientists that it employs, planned to grow this year by 3.4 percent to a figure just under 10,000. Nor will it cut its support for international projects, a move that would have been politically embarrassing at a time when France is trying to persuade its international partners at next week's Williamsburg economic summit to increase their collaboration on joint research.

The scientific director in each department of CNRS, however, will have to work out how to distribute the cuts in his or her anticipated budget. In particular, each is being asked to ensure that an equilibrium is maintained between, on the one hand, the continuation of previous efforts to replace out-of-date equipment in both CNRS and university laboratories and, on the other hand, efforts to stimulate new research considered important for the economic growth of France. Their recommendations will be passed to CNRS president Pierre Papon within the next few weeks.

The news could have been worse. Earlier this year, laboratories were told that they were authorized to spend up to 60 percent of their previously agreed research budgets for 1983—a move which led to the rumor (apparently fanned by the conservative press) that the remaining 40 percent would be suppressed. Last week's announcement means that research budgets will, in current francs, be about 7.5 percent higher than in 1983.

The word from inside the Ministry is that, despite the new austerity, commitment to a growing science budget remains strong. And those who point to the government's previous promise, signed into law by President Mitterrand last summer, to increase research spending from 1.8 to 2.5 percent of the gross national product by 1985, are referred to the small print where it adds that this only applies if the economy reaches a certain level of growth. Currently growth is well behind target; hence, it is argued, the commitment is no longer binding.

—**DAVID DICKSON**

## Gore Proposes Genetic Engineering Commission

Legislation creating a presidential commission to monitor genetic engineering that has potential human application was recently introduced by Representative Albert Gore, Jr. (D-Tenn.).

The proposed commission would be strictly advisory, not regulatory as some in the biotechnology community had feared. According to Gore's proposal, the group would review developments in the field and examine related medical, legal, ethical, and social issues.

The legislation is in the form of an amendment to the reauthorization bill for the National Institutes of Health, which was approved by the House Committee on Energy and Commerce on 10 May. No Senate counterpart to Gore's amendment has so far been proposed.

Gore's proposal stems from hearings held last November by the House science investigations and oversight subcommittee, which Gore chairs. The hearings focused on a report on gene splicing and its implications published by the President's Commission for the Study of Ethical Problems in Medicine and Biomedical and Behavioral Research. The bioethics commission, which itself went out of business on 31 March, urged the establishment of a panel to oversee genetic engineering, and Gore announced his intention to do just that. But he left open the possibility that the panel might have regulatory power, a prospect that made many scientists and biotechnology company executives uneasy.

According to his proposal, the commission would comprise 15 members, including six scientists; six people who are experts in law, theology, ethics, or the social sciences; and three laymen. The amendment says that three of six scientists would be recommended by the president of the National Academy of Sciences and three by the director of the National Institutes of Health. The appointments would all be made by the President.

The legislation authorizes expenditures of \$1.5 million a year over 3 years for the work of the commission.—**MARJORIE SUN**