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## New York Primate Lab Seeks Help from Congress

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New York University's primate center, which has led a precarious existence during the past few years, has once again sought direct support from Congress. The Senate recently approved an amendment that grants regional primate center status to the Laboratory for Experimental Medicine and Surgery in Primates (Lemsip) of Sterling Forest. Although this legislative move will grant no new funds to the New York facility, it could force the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to deal with Lemsip in a way it has so far resisted.

The New York primate center and NIH have been squabbling for years. NIH withdrew major financial support from Lemsip 5 years ago to concentrate support in the established regional primate centers. The move put the New York center in serious financial straits and led it to appeal to Congress for funds (*Science*, 19 December 1980, p. 1333). The appeal was unsuccessful, however, and the lab was forced to close temporarily. It was later revived with an infusion of private funds.

Lemsip has tried several times to become an NIH-sponsored regional primate research center. Currently there are seven such centers, all of which were set up in the early 1960's after a competition among nearly a dozen primate laboratories. The regional centers are set apart from other primate labs by receiving "core" support from NIH for six to ten scientists, who are nonetheless encouraged also to apply for competitive grants.

Although a case can be made for NIH adding new regional centers, "resources are not there," says William Gay, chief of the animal resources branch. Despite this limitation, Lemsip is trying to gain a new title—and perhaps a better chance at receiving core support—by law. "We were told by NIH officials that we would have to have an act of Congress" for this change of status, says Lemsip director Jan Moor-Jankowski. He says the NIH recently turned down a Lemsip grant, despite its receiving favorable review, because this is a facility "providing service only."

"There has been disagreement

about the concept of the primate centers," he continues. "But if NIH will fund an intramural research program, we will do it. We would like to become part of the NIH team."

Lemsip's new status was enacted by the Senate as part of the Health Professions Training Assistance Amendments of 1984. (Lemsip is seeking similar support in the House.) It was sponsored by Senators Alfonse M. D'Amato (R-N.Y.), Daniel P. Moynihan (D-N.Y.), and Orrin G. Hatch (R-Utah), who chairs the key Committee on Labor and Human Resources. In a statement on the Senate floor addressed to D'Amato, Hatch emphasized that the amendment would not expand existing programs, but simply allow a "highly respected primate center . . . the opportunity to compete."

—JEFFREY L. FOX

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## Environmental Retrofit Delays L-Reactor Restart

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The Department of Energy (DOE), under fire from environmentalists and South Carolina state regulators, has been forced to delay the controversial restart of a defense reactor in order to build a \$35-million cooling pond at the reactor site. The decision is the latest, and perhaps the final, chapter in a long battle over restarting the so-called L-reactor at DOE's Savannah River plant to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons.

The reactor, which was built in the early 1950's, was shut down in the late 1960's. Four years ago, the Administration began a \$200-million overhaul aimed at bringing the reactor back into production by October 1983 to help meet an expected sharp rise in plutonium requirements for the weapons program.

But environmental groups, led by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), filed suit to block the restart, arguing that DOE should produce an assessment of the reactor's impact on the environment before going ahead. Last summer, Congress, at the behest of South Carolina Senators Strom Thurmond (R) and Ernest Hollings (D), directed DOE to produce a formal environmental impact statement.

A draft statement, published last

fall, indicated that the reactor would cause severe damage to local wetlands by discharging hot water into a local creek and run the risk of contaminating ground water. These findings caused the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of the Interior to insist on the installation of better control technologies and South Carolina threatened to withhold necessary permits to operate the plant.

In the face of this reaction, DOE has decided to construct a 1000-acre pond at the site to prevent cooling water being discharged directly into the local environment and it has pledged to take a variety of other pollution control measures. This is expected to delay the restart of the reactor until next spring, some 18 months after the original target date.

Opponents are pleased that DOE has finally recognized the need for more environmental controls, but they argue that cooling towers, rather than a pond, should be installed. "DOE was going to use 1950's technology, now it is planning to use 1960's technology," says NRDC staff attorney S. Jacob Scherr. "We think they should use 1980's technology."

—COLIN NORMAN

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## Whaling Tensions Rise as Moratorium Approaches

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If all goes according to plan, the quotas for commercial whaling set by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) at its annual meeting in June will be the last before a total moratorium on whaling goes into effect at the end of 1985. Catch limits were cut by about a third from last year. But it was not clear at the Buenos Aires meeting whether the reduced quotas for 1984–1985 or, in fact, the moratorium itself will stick.

Japan, Norway, and the Soviet Union, the countries with the largest commercial whaling operations, have lodged reservations to the moratorium indicating that they may decide to continue whaling after the date for cessation. And there is strong speculation that one or more of these nations will register similar reservations to this year's lower quotas.

The IWC reduced the overall limit for commercial pelagic (high seas)

whaling from 9390 for 1983–1984 to 6623 for the coming 1984–1985 season. The biggest cut came in the quota for minke whales, the species now taken in the largest numbers. The limit on minke whales in the Southern Hemisphere this year is 4424 compared with 6600 last year. By agreement, Brazil takes 10 percent of the catch and Japan and the Soviet Union divide the balance evenly.

The minke is a comparatively small whale type, measuring about 25 feet in length at maturity. It became the mainstay of pelagic whaling in the 1970's as stocks of larger types were depleted and their capture prohibited. Observers say that this year's cuts in the quota could make whaling operations in the Antarctic uneconomic for the Japanese and Soviets and prompt them to reject the quotas.

Such action by Japan would be likely to cause a collision with the United States that both countries have been anxious to avoid. Implicit in U.S. policy toward the IWC, which is a voluntary organization without enforcement power, is that this country will back IWC conservation rules with economic sanctions against offenders such as curtailment of fishing rights in U.S. waters (*Science*, 25 May, p. 850). A serious test of these tactics was foreseen if Japan decided not to observe the moratorium, but an earlier trial may be in the offing.

—JOHN WALSH

## Omens of Doom for Nuclear Waste Tomb

The Department of Energy (DOE) has gotten occasionally exotic advice as it goes about preparing for the establishment of a high-level nuclear waste repository that will have to last for thousands of years.

It has asked Battelle Memorial Institute to propose ways the public could be warned away from such a facility centuries hence in the event that all records are destroyed, fences and signs have disintegrated, and the English language itself has mutated to strange new forms.

One proposal solicited by Battelle came from anthropologist Thomas Sebeok of Indiana University, who suggested making use of the "Tut-

ankhamen phenomenon." That is, devising myths of evil spirits along the lines of the "curse of the Pharaohs" to keep trespassers at bay. These stories, he said, could be perpetuated by an "atomic priesthood" of scientists and scholars which would appoint new members when the old ones died.

Sebeok says his idea has been distorted by members of the press, who have seized on it with considerable amusement. He says it was intended as a supplement to his two primary proposals. One is to inscribe redundant messages at the repository



DOE is looking for warnings more durable than this.

site, using iconic (a pictorial sequence), indexical (a physical demonstration), and symbolic (language) approaches. The other would be a "relay system" whereby the site would be inspected, perhaps every century, and the message updated in current parlance. The myths of evil spirits would fill in for those who could not read.

Sebeok's proposals actually fit in with DOE's plans which are to erect massive stone monuments at repository sites, perhaps "miniature pyramids," that would bear messages carved in pictographs and symbols warning passersby not to dig in the area. Contractors are looking around the world for written symbols that have stood the test of millennia. "Not too many people have made a study of this kind of communication into future generations," says Stanley Goldsmith of Battelle.

Communicating to future humans is only a tiny part of the massive preparations going on for this country's first high-level nuclear waste repository. DOE says between 2000 and 3000 scientists, social scientists,

and engineers are conducting probes, studies, and assessments of the nine sites under consideration. It is hoped a site will be selected in 1992, and ready for business by 1998.

—CONSTANCE HOLDEN

## Senate Wants Academy to Assess Medical Technology

The Senate has approved legislation directing the National Academy of Sciences to form a center for advising Health and Human Services on medical technology. The step is part of a move to have the private sector take an active and more centralized role in evaluating emergent health care technologies. It could lead to a permanent council on health care technology.

The idea for such a council was the major recommendation of a study conducted by the Academy's Institute of Medicine last year. The Senate action, which comes as an amendment to the Health Professions Training Assistance Act, authorizes the Academy to set up a 15-member council with a \$2-million federal grant, but stipulates that a \$1.5-million matching grant be obtained from the private sector. The amendment represents a modified version of a bill (S. 2504) introduced by Senator Dan Quayle (R-Ind.). A similar proposal has been approved by the House of Representatives.—JEFFREY L. FOX

## Hughes Medical Institute Funds Michigan Center

The Howard Hughes Medical Institute will establish a new \$8-million unit at the University of Michigan Medical Center for the study of molecular genetics, the university announced on 12 July.

Plans include the construction of two new buildings, one funded solely by the institute and the other funded jointly with the university. The institute will recruit three principal researchers for the new branch and staff.

The institute was founded by the late industrialist and has established laboratories at 15 medical centers around the country.—MARJORIE SUN