

NSF, Manufacturing Measures Deck NBS Bill

The bill authorizing program activities for the National Bureau of Standards caromed through Congress during the closing rush, and along the way picked up some controversial legislative cargo.

One amendment, tacked on in the Senate, has caused some unhappiness in the Executive and raised the possibility of a veto. This amendment, sponsored by Senator Slade Gorton (R-Wash.), in fact adds a whole separate piece of legislation, the Manufacturing Sciences and Robotics Research Act of 1984. The bill, which is designed to encourage research aimed at creating advanced manufacturing technologies, also has a provision to develop programs for the retraining of workers displaced by the utilization of new technologies. The possibility of a veto is seen because the bill runs counter to the Administration view that government should not be directly involved in such initiatives affecting the private sector. Some \$52 million is authorized in the bill for activities in the coming year, but no appropriation for the measure has been voted. The bill was not forwarded to the White House for action until 19 October and the program's partisans have had no direct word on whether President Reagan will veto it or not.

The manufacturing science bill's language is that of H.R. 5172 sponsored by House Science and Technology Committee chairman Don Fuqua (D-Fla.). Gorton sponsored legislation with a similar purpose in the Senate, but attaching Fuqua's bill, which had passed the House, facilitated passage in the closing crush.

Another amendment, also affixed in the Senate by Gorton, changes the phrasing of the National Science Foundation's basic law to give engineering greater prominence generally by adding the word "engineering" immediately after "scientific" and "engineer" following "scientist" in section after section. The agency's name is unchanged.

The NSF revision originated as a section of the NSF authorization bill passed by the House, and was a product of the effort over the last sev-

eral years to respond to engineering community pressure to give engineering and engineers more attention in the science foundation's programs and more equal billing generally. The language adopted originated in a bill sponsored by Representative George E. Brown, Jr. (D-Calif.).

Gorton, however, stepped on some toes jurisdictionally with the move. He is the chairman of a Senate Commerce subcommittee that has had a long-running turf fight with the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee chaired by Senator Orrin G. Hatch (R-Utah). The dispute has prevented the Senate from passing an NSF authorization bill for 4 years. Hatch went along with the amendment to NSF's organic act, but promptly noted in black and white in the 11 October *Congressional Record* that "I want the record to show that the addition of these provisions amending the NSF Organic Act of 1950 did not go unnoticed and should not be construed to give the Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee any jurisdiction over the National Science Foundation."

—JOHN WALSH

Salad, House Dressing, but Hold the Sulfites

A government-sponsored study has concluded in a tentative report that sulfites, used as food preservatives, can cause acute allergic reactions in asthmatics. But this and other findings in the report reiterated what the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) already knew, and FDA is no closer to regulating the food additives than it was 2 years ago.

Many restaurants sprinkle sulfites on fruit and vegetable salads and potatoes to prevent darkening. Sulfites are also used in the processing of wine, beer, imported shrimp, dried apricots and prunes, snacks, baked goods, and some drugs. As many as 1 million of the nation's 10 million asthmatics may be sensitive to sulfites. Reported reactions include flushing, tightness in the chest, difficulty in swallowing, weakness, shortness of breath, and dizziness. Nonasthmatics may also suffer allergic reactions. In the past 2 years, four deaths have

also been linked to the consumption of sulfited food.

Sulfite-sensitive individuals often are unaware that they are allergic to the food additive. Two years ago, a Washington, D.C.-based consumer group petitioned FDA to either ban sulfites from food or impose harsher restrictions and labeling requirements. Last year, FDA acknowledged that the addition of sulfites was not such a good idea and recommended that restaurants should stop the practice. Although the National Restaurant Association has urged its members not to use sulfites, many still do. The agency assigned the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology to review the health risks of sulfites. The group released its tentative report last week, which is subject to revision before final publication.

"Of course the report doesn't tell you anything new," says one FDA official, who requested anonymity. "We knew we weren't going to get anything new. They read all the studies we read. The issue has fallen into a black hole."

The study "was a waste of time," says Michael F. Jacobson, executive director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, the group that petitioned for a sulfite ban in 1982.

To alert consumers, the report said, restaurants should post notices and processors should label foods that the additives have been used. But FDA has considered these proposals before and they pose several regulatory problems. The agency has few resources to enforce the posting of notices at restaurants and has urged states to take up the cause. Only a few states have required the notices. Although FDA now requires packaged food to list sulfites used as a preservative, bulk food—such as imported shrimp (70 percent of the total consumed) and peeled and processed potatoes—are not labeled after sulfite treatment. FDA also does not have jurisdiction over wine and beer labeling. That authority belongs to the Treasury Department's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms.

The best solution is to ban sulfites altogether, Jacobson argues. Lemon juice or ascorbic acid can be used to keep food fresh-looking. Short of a ban, he says, the agency should greatly restrict the use of sulfites and require prominent labeling of all sulfit-

ed foods, including ingredients for salad bars. The use of sulfite additives in drugs, particularly those used by asthmatics, should be stopped, he argues.

The FDA official says that no particular group has forcefully opposed restrictions on the use of sulfites. "I don't think any [regulatory issue] at the agency has been moving over the past few years, short of a national disaster." The agency has assigned yet another group, a committee within FDA, to assess the extent of risk posed by sulfites.—**MARJORIE SUN**

VA Study of Twins May Be Canceled

The Veterans Administration (VA) may cancel a \$9-million study using twins to ascertain the long-term health effects of service in Vietnam. A final decision is yet to be announced, but members of the research staff have been told to start looking for other positions.

Richard Greene, the VA's medical research director, has recommended that the study be terminated following a review in August by a panel he convened. According to Hollis Boren, the assistant medical research director, the panel concluded that the study population was too small to yield useful information about Agent Orange. Furthermore, he said the psychiatrists on the panel concluded that since twins have "built-in support systems," psychological findings from the study could not be reliably generalized to the rest of the veteran population.

Seth A. Eisen, one of the principal investigators at the VA Medical Center in St. Louis, acknowledged that definitive Agent Orange findings would be unlikely. However, he said the study was "well designed to address the question" of whether Vietnam combat had produced sustained psychological effects. "We would come up with very clear answers," said Eisen.

The first part of the study, which will continue, entails compiling a registry of 12,000 twin pairs—including veterans and nonveterans—who will be sent detailed health questionnaires.

The VA is balking at the second part, which would involve extensive physical and psychological testing of

600 twin pairs. The main focus is on posttraumatic stress disorder and how service in Vietnam has affected men's lives and psychological well-being. It also would look at the effects of dioxin exposure. The study had already been reviewed and approved twice when Greene appointed a new panel.

Many scientists regard the twin study as a formidable tool for zeroing in on problems that have defied definitive answers. Former VA official Alvin L. Young, now at the President's Office of Science and Technology Policy, said he would be "very concerned" if the study were canceled and noted that the action could aggravate an already serious credibility problem with vets.

—**CONSTANCE HOLDEN**

Parasite Research Gets \$17-Million Boost

The MacArthur Foundation announced last week that it will give almost \$17 million to a dozen American and foreign research groups for the study of parasitology. The research will focus on the molecular biology and genetics of parasites with the goal of better controlling parasitic diseases.

Three billion people are estimated to suffer from parasitic infections, such as malaria and hookworm. Parasitic disease can lead to malnutrition, blindness, organ damage, and death.

The 5-year grant program was in part the inspiration of Jonas Salk, a member of the foundation's board of directors. About \$1.5 million has been allotted to each research group, according to Denis Prager, deputy director of the foundation's health programs. Last year, the foundation gave the World Health Organization \$1 million for parasitology. That money will largely be used for fieldwork.

Investigators at the following institutions were awarded grants: Case-Western Reserve, Columbia, Harvard, Massachusetts General Hospital, Johns Hopkins, New York University, Stanford, University of California at Berkeley, Yale, Hall Institute in Australia, National Polytechnical Institute in Mexico, and Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel.—**MARJORIE SUN**

Congress Gives Blessing to New York Primate Lab

In its final flurry of activity, the 98th Congress gave New York University a boost it long has been seeking. Congress designated the university's primate center, the Laboratory for Experimental Medicine and Surgery in Primates (Lemsip) of Sterling Forest, a regional primate center. Although that status change could still be withheld if President Reagan decides to veto the Public Health Service Amendments Act, to which this item is attached, the designation represents a major victory for Lemsip in a drawn out battle with the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

The primate center and NIH have disagreed for years over the status of and level of support for the center's program (*Science*, 3 August, p. 488). Lemsip has tried several times to become a regional primate center, a designation that the center's directors felt was deserved and that would help correct chronic funding problems. Currently there are seven regional primate centers (not counting Lemsip) that were set up nearly two decades ago. Each has a core program to support about a half-dozen scientists usually doing research with a common thread. Lemsip officials have argued that the center's research programs have been held back by lack of NIH support.

Although NIH has been interested in adding new regional primate centers to its program, it has lacked funds to do so and thus has argued that adding a new center could not be done without losing another. "It's not a closed program," an NIH official told *Science*. "It's just not easy for an institution to apply . . . and the competition would be stiff." Lemsip, however, has sidestepped the ordinary process for judging that competition by appealing directly to Congress.

A Lemsip spokesman points out that, despite the organization's use of legislation to change its status, no threat is intended to other regional primate labs. "All we were asking for was the opportunity to compete for core support," he says. "This should calm the controversy, as money will not be taken away from other regional primate centers." —**JEFFREY L. FOX**