

Adams, head of the new peace program at the MacArthur Foundation. The new group will complement the National Academy of Sciences' Committee on International Security and Arms Control, which is comprised primarily of physicists.

—CONSTANCE HOLDEN

A Science Primer for Freshman Legislators

In what was truly a freshman course in "Science and Government," a 2-day seminar was held recently in Washington to provide a primer for newly elected congressmen on issues dear to scientists' hearts. But despite an all-star cast of scientists and administrators, the ambience of the National Academy of Sciences, and offerings of catered lunch and dinner, fewer than a dozen of the 40 new legislators showed up. In fact, representatives of sponsoring organizations outnumbered the legislators.

"We don't propose to transform you into professional scientists in 2 days, but we are going to try to learn to talk the same language," said Mike McCormack, a former member of the House Science and Technology Committee. McCormack and George Washington University organized the meeting and arranged use of the Academy facilities. The meeting is apparently the first of its kind. Funding for the meeting, which cost about \$20,000, came from several scientific societies, private companies, and industry-related organizations. Two congressmen queried said they had come because they had been assigned to committees dealing with science matters.

Speakers included several former members of the House Science and Technology Committee, Lewis Thomas of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center; William Ruckelshaus, former administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency; Joshua Lederberg of Rockefeller University; Erich Bloch, director of the National Science Foundation; and Leon Lederman, director of Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory.

Thomas, the lead speaker, talked about human disease and survival and ended by saying that the study of

nuclear winter "is the most urgent scientific problem. And that's not hyperbole." Legislators, however, quizzed Thomas on other issues, such as rising medical costs, gene therapy, and hunger in developing countries. Other speakers discussed scientific method, risk assessment, mathematics, science education, biotechnology, epidemiology and cancer, and energy issues.

An assistant to McCormack said that there are sufficient funds to hold another seminar on science policy later this year, but no decision has been made about the specific topic or when and where the meeting will be held.

—MARJORIE SUN

Ashes to Ashes—to Orbit

Space Services, Incorporated, the Houston-based firm that has been trying for the last several years to develop a market for private space launches, has now signed its first contracts: sometime in 1986, a group of undertakers will use Space Services' privately built Conestoga booster to place human ashes into orbit.

"More than one mortician's group has approached us with this idea," says Space Services vice president William Vance. "So far, we've signed with two"—the Celestis Group of Melbourne, Florida, and the Starbound Company of Tyler, Texas.

Furthest along in its planning is Celestis, a consortium of engineers and morticians headed by Melbourne funeral director John Cherry. The group plans to accept human remains produced by conventional cremation, reduce them in volume by further heating, and place them in 1 centimeter by 3 centimeter capsules identified by name, Social Security number, and a religious symbol.

As many as 13,000 of these capsules will fit into the Celestis-designed payload vehicle, which will be launched by Space Services' Conestoga rocket into the Van Allen radiation belts, where it will remain in orbit for some 63 million years. The space mausoleum will be coated with reflective material so that relatives of the deceased can see it more easily as it passes overhead. The cost per person will be \$3900, say Celestis officials.—M. MITCHELL WALDROP

China's Science Academy Revamps Funding Process

The Chinese Academy of Sciences, the country's leading institution for science and technological research, is introducing major reforms in the way it funds research to promote competition among its scientists. In a break from the past, a substantial portion of research will now undergo peer review before funding is granted by the academy. The reforms were announced in January at an annual academy meeting in Peking, according to a recent article in the *Beijing Review*.

While peer review is the norm among Western scientific institutions, the practice has been foreign to the Chinese academy. For the past 30 years, the academy has allotted its various institutes an equal amount of research funds, "which, in turn, distributed the money to research groups without distinction," the article reported. "The practice resulted in research duplications and delays."

Now the academy will annually withhold 17 percent of its total research budget, \$214 million, as a discretionary fund to support basic and applied research. The individual institutes, which now total 117, will vie for the money by submitting proposals for peer review.

The academy also announced that it will contract out for certain applied science projects, such as those related to construction and the transfer of technology from other countries to China.

"Thus, the amount of research funds [that] each institute gets from the academy is determined by how well its work is done," said Yan Dongsheng, the Chinese academy's vice-chairman. The reforms will help "cut down on inappropriate projects," he noted.

The academy also announced it also will give the individual institutes more authority over day-to-day management of activities and will focus its attention on long-range planning for research. Previously the academy exercised "very strong control" over the institutes, according to Li Shu Bao, a science official at the Chinese embassy in Washington.

—MARJORIE SUN