

the project was begun in 1981, it was anticipated that market prices for gas would be much higher and that no price subsidies would be required.

At *Science's* press time, the project's industrial participants were saying there was cause for hope. But negotiators also feared talks might break down unless the matter was resolved within days. A number of new financing schemes have been drawn up, sponsors say. The alternatives call for the five partners to add \$190 million in cash to the \$543 million in existing investment they have in the plant.

This package is similar to the plan negotiated by the staff of the SFC, which was shelved. This occurred after the DOE's new secretary, John Herrington, told the SFC he opposed price supports unless he is assured of the plant's long-term operation. Until 20 May, DOE had strongly supported price guarantees for the project.

Debate within the Administration is said to center on whether the project should be saved at all. Industry officials say that if the government turns its back on Great Plains, it will severely damage industry confidence in entering into similar first-time, high-risk ventures involving federal agencies.—**MARK CRAWFORD**

Caltech, MIT Deny Role in Star Wars Research

The merits of President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, popularly known as the "Star Wars" program, remain in dispute on academic campuses, with some professors seeking research grants and others asserting that the research is doomed to failure. Fearful of becoming entangled in the fray, several academic administrators have recently taken steps to ensure that an image of official neutrality remains fixed in the public eye.

In particular, the presidents of MIT and Caltech have contacted the program's director, Lt. General James Abrahamson, to complain about recent statements indicating that both universities have decided to participate in "Star Wars" research consortia. In a letter on 3 May, Caltech's Marvin Goldberger forcefully denied this claim, accusing Pentagon officials

of "gross misrepresentation" and "manifestly false" statements to the press. A sole Caltech professor, Demetri Psaltis, is presently participating in the "Star Wars" research.

Similarly, MIT president Paul Gray, in a 3 June speech to graduating seniors on the need for institutional neutrality on a variety of public policy issues, also took great pains to note that individual MIT researchers, not the institution as a whole, had become involved in "Star Wars" research. He specifically accused James Ionson, director of the program's Innovative Science and Technology Office, of using "MIT and other universities as political instruments" in a "manipulative effort to garner implicit institutional endorsement."

Ionson replies that "the point is, we've got a highly qualified group of scientists working on this effort." In the future, he says, the Pentagon will be more careful to delineate between consortia of investigators and consortia of institutions.

—**R. JEFFREY SMITH**

Judge Blocks Biological Warfare Laboratory

The U.S. Army has been enjoined from constructing a controversial biological warfare laboratory because it failed to take a careful look at the potential environmental risks. In a decision on 31 May, U.S. district court Judge Joyce Hens Green said that "given the deadly nature of the material being tested, considerations of the larger interests of society—particularly concerns for public health and safety—militate heavily in favor of enjoining construction."

The laboratory, which was to have been constructed on a crash basis at Dugway Proving Ground in Utah, was approved by a handful of congressmen last December, despite opposition from prominent micro- and molecular biologists. Its avowed purpose was to test defensive biological warfare equipment and clothing against extremely dangerous pathogens in aerosol form. Subsequently, Jeremy Rifkin, a longtime activist in the area of genetic engineering, brought suit against the Army to compel preparation of a formal environmental impact

statement, which the Army had judged unnecessary. The laboratory had strong support from Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger but was challenged by Senator James Sasser (D-Tenn.), who thinks it should have had greater congressional scrutiny.

In her decision, Judge Green said that the probability of an accident at the laboratory "with extraordinary, potentially irreparable consequences" was low, but real, and she chastised the Army for failing to conduct more than a brief assessment that "represents but an amalgam of conclusory statements and unsupported assertions of 'no impact.'"

In particular, Green noted, the assessment failed to mention "the unique geographical characteristics of the surrounding area, the degree to which the action is likely to be controversial, the extent to which the possible effects on the human environment are likely to be unknown, the long- and short-term effects of the action on the local region and on society as a whole, the degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species, and the possibility, if any, that the action may threaten a violation of federal, state, or local laws or requirements."

This was not Rifkin's central argument. Along with several witnesses, Rifkin was primarily concerned that the Army had failed to discuss the implications of using pathogens engineered with recombinant-DNA techniques, and to consider seriously the use of pathogenic simulants. Judge Green said that the first of these complaints was without merit because the Army has only *contemplated* the use of genetically engineered pathogens, not *proposed* it. She also said that "whether the [Army] shall choose to discuss contaminant procedures, the use of simulants, or the specific hazards of aerosols in future assessments is a technical decision that rests with the agency. Of sole concern to this Court is simply that the assessment, when completed, provide 'convincing reasons why potential impacts are truly insignificant.'"

Green said that preparation of a formal impact statement would necessitate only an "insubstantial delay" in the laboratory's construction. The Army has not yet decided whether it will appeal.—**R. JEFFREY SMITH**