More Pork Barrel in DOD Research Initiative

An effort by the Defense Department to fund new academic research is attracting enormous enthusiasm, both on Capitol Hill and on university campuses. The effort, known as the University Research Initiative, was conceived by the Pentagon early this year to fund research and training in areas of military interest (*Science*, 19 April, p.303). Congress has not yet fixed a precise budget for the program, but it will likely be substantial. Recently, the House of Representatives approved an expenditure of $25 million, and the Senate Appropriations Committee approved an expenditure of $100 million.

So determined are some institutions to grab a portion of this largesse that they have arranged to forgo the inconvenience of the peer review process. Oklahoma State University, for example, will probably be the beneficiary of $1 million from the new program, courtesy of Representative Wes Watkins (D–Okla.), a 1960 graduate of Oklahoma State and a former assistant director of admissions there. His amendment to the program's budget, requiring the grant, has been approved by the House.

Similarly, Syracuse University will probably be the beneficiary of a $12-million grant for computer science, which may or may not be drawn from the new program. Senator Alfonse d'Amato (D–N.Y.) initially sought $29.5 million for his alma mater from the research initiative, more than the total amount requested by the Reagan Administration for all schools. But vigorous protests from the Association of American Universities (AAU) and the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges spurred several Senators to question the allocation, and the amount was reduced to $12 million. In addition, the Pentagon was allowed to determine which of its programs will pay the tab.

Somewhat more subtle is a demand in the Pentagon's appropriations bill for a $1-million pilot program in advanced semiconductor research at "a private nonprofit institution which possesses established expertise in research in advanced semiconductor materials and devices, and which is empowered to grant graduate level degrees." The request, inserted by Representative Les AuCoin (D–Ore.), is intended to benefit the Oregon Graduate Center, just west of Portland, according to AuCoin's staff. But the provision was worded so that other schools may apply, and considerable competition may ensue. The amendment specifically directs the Pentagon to establish the program by next April and to provide funding for it in the future.

The difficulty, says Leo Young, the Pentagon's director for basic research and laboratory management, "is that we are already doing this in spades." Fourteen universities are already participating in the Joint Service Electronics Program, which funds a broad range of research on electronic devices and circuits. The grant for Oklahoma State is relatively small, he adds, "but we believe in peer review and the risk is that if everybody started to ask for special favors, this could easily get out of hand and we wouldn't have a coherent program anymore."

Jack Crowley, the AAU legislative director, is more blunt. "We clearly intend to ask the conferees to delete funds for both Oklahoma State and Syracuse," he says. "This program must be kept free of earmarking and based on merit." The next vote, scheduled for 18 November, will be on the Senate floor, and after that a conference committee will resolve any remaining disputes.

—R. JEFFREY SMITH

European Nations Agree on Eureka Charter

Paris. French ambitions to create a "technological Europe" advanced a step further last week with the endorsement by research and foreign ministers of 18 separate European countries of detailed plans for a new organization responsible for encouraging greater collaboration among governments, private companies, and scientific institutions in a range of high technology research and development fields.

The French proposal—known as Eureka, which stands loosely for European Research Coordination Agency—was first put forward in April as a way of helping European industry to meet increasing competition from the United States and Japan, and was seen by many as a direct response to the U.S. invitation to collaborate in the Strategic Defense Initiative (*Science*, 12 July 1985, p. 141).

Meeting in the West German city of Hanover, the representatives of the 18 nations who have so far agreed to support Eureka, including in particular all 12 members of the European Economic Community, approved a charter outlining the principles governing its operation. For example, countries will be free to sign up for only those projects they are directly interested in.

A preliminary list of ten research projects was also approved, ranging from a French-Danish collaboration on the development of filtration membranes to a German proposal for the creation of a Europe-wide computer-based information network linking scientists in universities and other research institutions.

A permanent secretariat will be established in a location yet to be decided—Strasbourg is a likely choice—to keep track of the various R&D projects that are eventually accepted for inclusion under the Eureka umbrella.

Finally, although France and the Netherlands are the only countries to have committed themselves to providing government funds specifically for Eureka projects, both West Germany and the United Kingdom have agreed in principle to make modest amounts of money available—even though both countries continue to maintain their belief that the bulk of the funding must come from private sources.

—DAVID DICKSON

Outside Review Urged for Waste Site Study

The National Research Council has given a qualified endorsement to the Department of Energy's methodology for selecting the nation's first high-level waste disposal site. But the arm of the National Academy of Sciences also wants the department to slow down its program schedule to allow for thorough study. And it says an independent panel of experts ought to review site-performance evaluations done by the department.

DOE's methodology was first described by the council as being inadequate and biased in a 26 April letter sent to the department. In the wake of that criticism, DOE is adopting a multiattribute utility technique for evaluating sites in Texas, Nevada, and Washington states. These states, along with environmental organizations, have been challenging the way the department has proceeded with its site selection process. DOE aims to open the first repository, which would contain high-level wastes deep underground, in 1998.

DOE's Office of Civilian Waste Management had sought to issue final environmental assessments on potential sites by 20 December. But in response to NRC recommendations, the department is delaying their release until mid-February to provide adequate time to apply the new evaluation criteria. ". . . It is crucial that DOE take the time to do the job right," says Frank Parker, chairman of the council's board on radioactive waste management. He notes that the complexity of the multiattribute utility method "demands scrupulous, methodical implementation. . . ."

DOE also has asked NRC's board on radioactive waste management to provide the recommended independent review of the application of site-evaluation criteria for bias. The NRC board was "concerned that DOE's use of its own technical experts to assess performance by this subjective method [multiattribute technique] may mask the degree of real uncertainty associated with post-closure issues," says Parker. Post-closure involves the ability of a site to contain radionuclides after it has been filled to capacity and sealed.

This matter is of intense interest to critics of DOE's waste disposal program. In particular, states and environmental groups have challenged DOE's assertion that the candidate sites are virtually indistinguishable with respect to their ability to protect the environment and public health. The credibility of DOE's findings would be substantially enhanced," Parker says, if DOE's procedures were verified by an independent body. While the council has endorsed DOE's methodology, Parker notes that it remains to be seen if the department will execute the site selection analysis properly.—**MARK CRAWFORD**

Academy Receives Gift for West Coast Center

The National Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Engineering will soon have an outpost on the West Coast thanks to the largesse of the Arnold and Mabel Beckman Foundation, which is donating $20 million for the establishment of a study center adjacent to the University of California at Irvine. The center will be built on a 7-acre site valued at $6 million donated by the Irvine Company, which developed the city of Irvine.

The gift is the latest in a continuing bonanza for American science arranged by California entrepreneur Arnold O. Beckman, 85, who has made a fortune in manufacturing precision instruments. In 1982 his company, Beckman Instruments Inc., merged with Smith-Kline Corp. of Philadelphia to form SmithKline Beckman. Beckman formed the foundation to distribute his holdings before he dies.

Arnold O. Beckman

The center is to be completed by the spring of 1987. According to NAS president Frank Press, it will not only improve access to the NAS-NAE by California members but will mean closer ties to the scientific communities of Japan and other nations of the Pacific. The center is expected to strengthen Academy programs on training and instrumentation, technology transfer, international collaboration, and science-related ethical and social issues. Both academies are now engaged in a major fund-raising effort to support the expanded activities.

Beckman's foundation has so far donated more than $100 million in gifts, including $40 million to the University of Illinois for two multidisciplinary research centers, on computing science and on behavior and cognition. Other major gifts include $12 million to Stanford University for a new center on molecular and genetic medicine; $10 million for a research institute at City of Hope Medical Center in Duarte, California; and $7 million for laboratories and an auditorium at the California Institute of Technology.—**CONSTANCE HOLDEN**

Administration Drafts Biotech Plan for OECD

After considerable disagreement, federal regulatory agencies have hammered out a proposal to set up international guidelines to regulate biotechnology. The plan will be presented for consideration in December at a Paris meeting of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The organization, which includes the United States, most of its European allies, and Japan, has been discussing the need to develop a set of principles to regulate biotechnology for the past 2 years.

The proposal represents a revision of a plan that the Administration floated for discussion last spring at an OECD meeting. But U.S. delegates themselves disagreed about the content of the proposal (*Science*, 30 August, p. 842). The original proposal was drawn up mainly by the Environmental Protection Agency, but was criticized for being too regulatory in tone by other U.S. agencies, including the Food and Drug Administration, the State Department, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Since then the U.S. agencies have been trying to iron out their differences.

The new version is a broad outline of points to consider without some of the regulatory detail that was originally included, such as a list of specific controls on large-scale production of microbes. Unlike the first plan, the new one proposes a uniform system to classify organisms according to their pathogenicity so that countries do not regulate a particular organism differently, and it discusses general methods of risk assessment related to biotechnology products.

—**MARJORIE SUN**