

\$69.7 million earmarked for the projects. Calling it the "hog heaven amendment," Walker complained that the projects had not been peer reviewed for scientific merit and that the expenditure had not been approved by the House Committee on Science and Technology, which is supposed to authorize DOE programs.

Noting that this one appropriations measure contained \$10 million of academic pork barrel funds in FY 1984, \$30 million in FY 1985, \$48 million in FY 1986, and nearly \$70 million in FY 1987, Walker argued that the funds "come out of the hide of other deserving projects all across the country." He added, "political determinations are made about science rather than good academic scientific decisions."

Next came Representative Don Fuqua (D-FL), chairman of the House Science and Technology Committee. Fuqua was in a difficult position. The Appropriations Committee had ridden roughshod over the science committee's turf, but, if he sided with Walker, he would offend some powerful congressmen who were championing the projects. He attempted a "compromise," offering a substitute for Walker's amendment that would prohibit DOE from spending money on the projects until it has thoroughly reviewed detailed proposals for them.

Walker wouldn't have any of it. He could see that the amendment would almost certainly result in the projects eventually being funded, and managed to get Fuqua's amendment ruled out of order. There then followed a debate on the merits and problems associated with distributing funds on the basis of scientific peer review.

The tone was set by Representative Tom Bevell (D-AL), chairman of the appropriations subcommittee that approved the bill. "We are being asked for Congress to delegate its responsibility to these peers to handle most of the research money in this country," he said. "Let us let the Congress handle a little of the money."

Representative Manuel Lujan, Jr. (R-NM), the ranking minority member of the science committee, raised the issue of fairness. He noted that 51% of federal R&D funds go to only 30 universities, and no universities in the Southeast and Southwest rank among the top 20 recipients of federal research dollars. "Clearly, Congress has a role to play in redressing this imbalance," he argued.

After more than an hour of debate, Walker's amendment was so soundly defeated that there is now no room for doubt about where the House stands on earmarking funds for academic projects. The bill now goes to the Senate.

All this is not going down well among



**Representative Walker.** Author of "hog heaven amendment" to delete pork barrel funds.

academic and scientific organizations, which have been fighting hard for the past few years to curb the practice of pork barrel funding for science projects. It is also creating disquiet in the funding agencies. One DOE official, for example, noted that all the projects funded in this bill involve construction, but they will be supported with funds that are supposed to go to research. The effect, he says, is a transfer of funds from research to bricks and mortar. ■

COLIN NORMAN

## Britain Offers Plan for Chemical Weapons Verification

In a move designed to remove the largest remaining obstacle to international agreement on a treaty banning chemical weapons, the British government has put forward a proposal to bridge the current gap between U.S. and Soviet positions on verification procedures.

Britain's suggestion maintains the U.S. insistence that such a treaty must include a provision for spot checks on a signatory suspected of producing chemical weapons clandestinely. Its novelty is to allow the challenged country to select how it demonstrates its innocence, provided this is done within 10 days from the challenge.

The hope is that this will go some way toward meeting Soviet reservations about giving access on demand to militarily sensi-

tive installations. If a compromise is reached on the verification issue, it could pave the way for agreement on a full chemical weapons treaty for submission to the United Nations General Assembly by the end of next year.

Timothy Renton, Britain's Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, told the U.N. Conference on Disarmament in Geneva on 15 July that adequate verification procedures, including a stringent provision for challenge inspections "in exceptional circumstances," was an essential safety net for the convention to minimize the possibilities of cheating.

The United States and the Soviet Union are close to agreement on the procedures that would normally be used to verify compliance. These would include checks that existing stockpiles and production facilities were being destroyed, and that chemicals from civilian industry were not being diverted into military production.

Under the British proposals, a state suspected of noncompliance would be required to accept a visit from a technical inspection team. The team would arrive within 72 hours of the challenge being made, and the challenged country would then have 7 days to provide all the evidence it felt necessary to prove its innocence.

If, at the end of this period, the inspection team was not satisfied with what it had been shown, the country concerned would then be considered to have infringed the treaty. The next step would then be decided "at the political level" by all signatories to the treaty.

"Our fundamental philosophical approach is identical to that of the United States, in that we repeat the absolute obligation [on a signatory country] to demonstrate compliance," said a member of the British delegation to the disarmament talks. "However, we have taken one step back in purposely not describing any specific methods for doing so.

"The Soviet Union never fails to say that it is prepared to accept verification on challenge as long as there is some right of refusal. In our proposals, there is the right of refusal of comprehensive access," if this was considered necessary on security grounds, he said.

Renton said after his speech that the proposals "put the ball very much in the Soviet court." Indeed, they are seen by some as deliberately being used to test assertions by Soviet leaders, recently repeated by Mikhail Gorbachev, that they are keen to reach agreement on a chemical weapons ban in the near future.

Officially, the United States still maintains its position that it requires a treaty to guar-

antee the right to inspect any suspect installation on 48 hours notice, although there have been suggestions that it may be prepared to modify this condition slightly.

U.S. officials say they are awaiting Soviet reaction to the proposals with interest. ■

DAVID DICKSON

## OMB and Congress at Odds Over Cancer Risk Policy

A long-simmering dispute between Congress and the White House over the interpretation of cancer risks has come to the boil once again. As a result, a House subcommittee voted in July to cut \$5.4 million from the operating funds of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The gesture was a slap at OMB for its alleged meddling in scientific risk studies.

On 22 July, a subcommittee headed by Representative John Dingell (D-MI) announced that it was looking into the work of OMB's Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs. Dingell claims that, as a favor to industry, this office—headed by Wendy Lee Gramm, wife of Senator Phil Gramm (R-TX) of Gramm-Rudman fame—has been leaning on regulatory officials to downplay cancer risks. Dingell persuaded a House appropriations subcommittee on 24 July to "defund" Gramm's office in the budget. The issue has not yet come before the full appropriations committee.

The main offense cited by Dingell's staff involves some guidelines on risk assessment recently prepared by the Environmental Protection Agency, apparently seen by OMB as unduly cautious. Drafted in 1984, the new rules are in accord with an earlier White House study of chemical hazards, conducted for the Office of Science and Technology Policy. EPA intends to use the rules to standardize five areas of risk assessment within the agency, including estimates of the threat of cancer and genetic damage.

EPA had its scientific advisory panel review the rules last year. It also solicited public comment. The rules were revised and sent to OMB for final approval in April. There they sit. As of this writing, OMB has neither given its approval nor put its objections in writing, although OMB staffers have raised questions orally. In a telephone interview, one EPA official sounded exasperated: "It is time to reach a resolution," he said. Dingell charges that OMB is stalling and trying to kill the section on cancer risks, which it sees as overprotective.

Meanwhile, in a speech in May, Wendy Lee Gramm indicated that her staff is "considering developing more specific guidance for performing risk assessments." She stressed the need to emphasize costs and benefits of regulation, to let policymakers and not technical people set margins of safety, to consider negative as well as positive studies, and to use data from all animal tests—"not just the species that shows the highest estimate of risk (unless there is reason to believe that one species is a better predictor of human risks). . . ."

Dingell accuses OMB's policy analysts of blundering into areas in which they are not qualified to make judgments. As one federal scientist put it, "OMB is playing bully on the block."

Gramm has responded vigorously to the criticism. In June she set out a new policy designed to let the public see more of the interplay between OMB and the agencies it reviews. All petitions to OMB on agency



**John Dingell.** *Investigating OMB's regulatory office.*

rules are to be made public, as are written comments from OMB to the agencies. Whenever OMB holds a meeting with industry officials on a proposed rule, the proposing agency now must be invited to attend.

In a telephone interview, Gramm denied that OMB is preparing substitutes for EPA's risk assessment guidelines. She did say, however, that, "We may want to do some follow-on guidelines to OSTP's work" at a later date. If that happens, the new guidelines will not come from OMB but from an interagency task force. Of EPA's cancer guidelines, she said: "Basically, we are reviewing them; nothing is being held up. . . . The staff doesn't have any real problems

with the science, but we want to make sure policymakers have a sense of what the uncertainties are." She would like risk estimates to include an easy-to-understand summary of the assumed "conservatism." For example, a risk assessment for drinking water might point out that it rests on the assumption that a person will drink 2 quarts of water from the worst well in the neighborhood every day for 70 years.

Asked if OMB is seeking to rewrite the cancer policy adopted by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration in 1980, Gramm said: "OSHA has proposed looking at its guidelines. . . . We're not in the business of rewriting things. We are a policy oversight group." ■ **ELIOT MARSHALL**

## Britain's Royal Society Condemns Sex Bias in Math Teaching

Britain's top scientific body, the Royal Society, has found "no convincing or conclusive evidence" that the poor performance of girls relative to boys in mathematics can be adequately explained by differences in innate ability. The conclusion is contained in a report prepared jointly by the society and the Institute of Mathematics and its Applications that has just been published in London.

In contrast to those who put forward genetic explanations, the report says that the main reason for the difference in performance lies more in the attitude of parents, teachers, and examination boards who continue to portray mathematics as a "male" subject. The result, it says, is that many girls deliberately underachieve in mathematics, adopting a negative attitude toward the subject and associating success in mathematics with an "undermining of their femininity."

Although similar complaints have been voiced by women's groups for years, it is the first time that such a strong complaint about sex biases in mathematics teaching has come from a body as prestigious as the Royal Society. "The result is that it is unlikely to be construed as a purely political statement," says the society's education officer, Gill Nelson.

The report admits that the number of girls taking mathematical subjects has increased in recent years, but adds that the trend needs to be "accelerated," given the importance of mathematics in both everyday and professional life. Problems begin in primary schools, it says, where boys and girls achieve