Briefing:

NSF Appoints Two Assistant Directors

National Science Foundation director Erich Bloch has announced the appointment of new heads for two of its directorates centrally involved in NSF efforts to promote economic competitiveness. Taking over as assistant director for engineering is John A. White, professor of engineering at Georgia Institute of Technology's School of Industrial and Systems Engineering. The new assistant director for computer and information science and engineering (CISE) is William A. Wulf, who has been a professor of engineering and applied science at the University of Virginia.

White's predecessor in the engineering post was Nam P. Suh, who has returned to MIT. The engineering directorate has played a major role in establishing more than a dozen interdisciplinary engineering research centers in recent years. Wulf succeeds C. Gordon Bell, first assistant director for CISE, who returned to industry. CISE was formed in 1986 by consolidating foundation activities in computer science and computer engineering. ■ **J.W.**

Legislating Labs as Drug-Free Workplaces

In readying several authorization bills for floor action, the House science committee has attached a cryptic rider aimed at insuring that work under grants and contracts awarded by the National Science Foundation and other science agencies be carried out in a "drug-free workplace."

Author of the provision is Representative Robert S. Walker (R–PA). The amendment, radically condensed from its original version, simply states that "No funds authorized to be expended under this act shall be expended in any workplace which is not free from illegal use of controlled substances." The short form was apparently adopted mainly to avoid the prospect of "sequential referral," that is, sharing legislative jurisdiction with other House committees.

The amendment was attached to the NSF bill by the full House Science, Space and Technology Committee. The committee also added it to corresponding legislation for the Department of Energy, National Bureau of Standards, and National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

The earlier version of Walker's amendment went into considerable detail in placing responsibility for enforcing a drug-free environment on recipients of grants and contracts and on federal agencies for insuring compliance with the law. A finding against the employer could have triggered the withholding of federal funds.

At this point, agency officials are left to puzzle out how the current version should be implemented if it becomes law. Sources on Capitol Hill say that the framers intend that the language of the amendment be interpreted literally. Agencies are to be given broad discretion, but are expected to achieve the goal of a drug-free workplace.

The amendment roused strong opposition in committee from several members but won a key vote 20 to 7. The measure has a number of hurdles to clear before becoming law, but Congress watchers say that legislators may find it difficult to appear to vote against a drug control measure, particularly in an election year. ■ **J.W.**

Soviet Satellite in Trouble; Groups Call for Ban on Orbiting Reactors

With fortuitous timing, a group of U.S. and Soviet scientists last week proposed that nuclear power sources be banned from Earth orbit just as the Soviet Union acknowledged that one of its nuclear-powered reconnaissance satellites is in danger of falling to Earth in the next few months.

The orbit of the satellite, known in the West as a Radar Ocean Reconnaissance Satellite, or RORSAT, has been decaying recently. RORSATs are believed to have a safety system that separates the reactor from the satellite and kicks it into a high orbit before the satellite reenters the Earth's atmosphere. The reactor has not separated from the apparently malfunctioning satellite, however, and there is concern that the safety system has failed.

If so, radioactive parts of the reactor could survive reentry. A similar mishap in 1978 scattered radioactive debris in parts of northwestern Canada.

The call for a ban on orbiting nuclear power sources came from a joint committee of the U.S. Federation of American Scientists and the Committee of Soviet Scientists Against the Nuclear Threat. It was motivated only partly by environmental concerns. A joint statement by the two organizations says it also "grows out of our efforts to prevent . . . the extension of the arms race into space."

Such a ban would have an immediate impact on the Soviet Union, forcing it to move to solar power for its RORSATs. The satellites, which are believed to be the only Soviet satellites that use nuclear power, are designed to monitor naval movements and could provide targeting information during wartime.

The United States does not now have any nuclear-powered Earth-orbiting satellites. A ban could, however, have a serious impact on plans for the Strategic Defense Initiative, for nuclear power is currently envisioned for some satellites that would be deployed in later stages of an antimissile defense system.

A type of nuclear power source will be used by both Soviet and U.S. spacecraft for deep space missions, such as the upcoming Galileo and Ulysses missions. The joint proposal says that such missions should be exempt from a ban on nuclear power in space. ■ **C.N.**

National Science Board Elects Good and Day

The new chair of the National Science Board, the policy-making body of the National Science Foundation, is Mary L. Good, president–engineered materials research, Allied Signal Corporation. Elected vice chair was Thomas B. Day, president of San Diego State University in California.

Good is the first woman to head the NSB. She earned her Ph.D. in chemistry from the University of Arkansas, and was a professor of chemistry at LSU before moving to industry in 1980. She was appointed to the NSB in 1980 and served as vice chair of the board from 1982 to 1984.

Day holds a Ph.D. in physics from Cornell. He has made his career in university research and administration and also been active as a consultant to government and industry.

The terms for NSB chair and vice chair are 2 years. Good's predecessor as NSB chair was Roland W. Schmitt, president of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. The vice chair was Charles E. Hess, dean of agriculture at the University of California, Davis. ■ **J.W.**

Curien Returns as French Science Minister

Paris

The French scientific community seems likely to emerge as a significant beneficiary of socialist President François Mitterrand's sweeping win in the country's presidential elections on 9 May.

Mitterrand's preelection commitments to policies treating research as what he described as a "favorite child" of the government have been reinforced by the decision of the new Prime Minister, Michel Rocard, to reappoint physicist Hubert Curien as re-