reasonably confident that they can identify the ivory accurately," Martin said, but conceded that as yet there was no data to support this statement.

But opponents of the proposal say that this is naïve in the extreme. Richard Leakey, director of Wildlife in Kenya, dismisses Martin's claim saying, "It'll be years before that's going." And though he seems to have put an end to poaching in Kenya, Leakey points out that populations elsewhere in East Africa "are way down, and most of that ivory is probably going south."

Countries are free to enter reservations to any CITES decision they do not like, and CITES regulations themselves do not have the force of law. Martin says "the reservations are all prepared." That would free SACIM members to trade with nonmembers of CITES, with no controls. But many observers do not think it will come to that. The key vote could be that of Japan, destination for much of Africa's ivory.

Japan is keen to host the next meeting of CITES, and to recover some of the prestige it has lost in the international environmental community because of its support for whaling. If Japan backs a compromise allowing trade in ivory from southern Africa, and if SACIM really can control ivory within its borders, elephants in the rest of Africa may be more secure. ■ **JEREMY CHERFAS**

NRC Unveils Agriculture R&D Plan

The National Research Council's Board on Agriculture is publicly calling on the Bush Administration and Congress to get behind a $500-million competitive grants program for agricultural research. The figure is staggering, given the fact that the U.S. Department of Agriculture will spend only about $45 million in fiscal year 1990 for such grants. But proponents argue that the investment is essential to keep U.S. farmers competitive and to address environmental problems and food safety concerns connected to farming.

The proposal, outlined in an NRC report published this week, *Investing in Research*, has been under discussion in the agricultural research community for some time (*Science*, 14 April, p. 140). "We have to substitute knowledge for low wages," says Board on Agriculture Chairman Theodore Hullar, the chancellor of the University of California at Davis. Huller argues that without improvements in agricultural productivity, the United States may see food exports decline in the face of competition from the European Economic Community and developing nations.

A strong coalition of agricultural organizations, including the American Farm Bureau, is reportedly rallying behind the NRC plan. Says Huller, who helped initiate the funding campaign, "$500 million is not an unreasonable request for what is one of America's basic industries." Secretary of Agriculture Clayton Yeutter also is supportive of an expanded competitive research program at USDA. But the level of funding that Yeutter and the Office of Management and Budget are willing to support may not be clear until early next year when President Bush submits his 1991 budget proposal to Congress.

Charles Hess, assistant secretary for science at the Department of Agriculture, however, openly backs a $500-million program. He told *Science* that dollar for dollar, the agricultural R&D program will deliver far more economic bang than the $6-billion Superconducting Super Collider. This kind of funding is necessary to accelerate the application of genetic engineering to create drought- and pest-resistant crops and to reduce farmers' use of pesticides and fertilizers.

The expanded program envisioned in the NRC's plan would encompass six areas: plant genetics and plant-pest interactions, animal systems, nutrition and food quality, natural resources and the environment, product and process engineering, and marketing strategies and trade policy. The existing $45-million annual budget for competitive grants would be combined with an additional $500 million a year and distributed in the following way:

- $250 million to fund about 800 principal investigator grants for an average duration of 3 years.
- $150 million for an estimated 180 fundamental multidisciplinary team grants spanning an average of 4 years.
- $100 million to support approximately 60 mission-linked multidisciplinary team grants for an average period of 4 years.
- $50 million to strengthen the infrastructure of research institutions and to fund individual fellowships.

The NRC report emphasizes that these grants should be financed with new money, not funds taken from existing land-grant research programs or the budget of USDA's Agricultural Research Service. With Congress having to reduce the federal budget deficit to $64 billion in 1991, winning support for the R&D program will be hard. Says Hess, "We have to convince people in this very difficult fiscal environment that this kind of investment in the future still should be made." ■ **MARK CRAWFORD**

Abortion: Litmus Test for NIH Director

Washington University chancellor William Danforth is (or was) on the short list for the NIH director's job. Last week, he got a call from someone in the White House personnel office who had just two questions on his mind. "What are your views on abortion?" he reportedly asked Danforth. "And what are your views on fetal research?" Danforth told a colleague that his response was simple and direct. "If that is all you want to know, I'm not your man."

In a telephone interview with *Science* shortly after word of the White House call spread through inside circles in Washington, Danforth said he preferred not to comment "on what someone did or did not ask me," but he was not at all reluctant to comment on the chances that he would become director of the National Institutes of Health. "It's not my thing," said Danforth. "I am wedded to Washington University where I have been chancellor since 1971."

Danforth is out. The "A" word is in.

If the White House insists on an NIH director who is opposed to abortion, the search might as well begin anew because no one on the current list of candidates (*Science*, 15 September, p. 1181) has taken a strong pro-life stance. Furthermore, none believes that abortion should be the litmus test in any case.

News of the "abortion call" has reinforced the idea that the only way to depoliticize the NIH directorship is to establish it in law as a 6-year position that survives changes in Administration. The National Science Foundation directorship is a precedent for this and a couple of biomedical leaders are hoping that sympathetic members of Congress can be persuaded to introduce such a bill.

NIH has been without leadership at the top since the end of July when former director James B. Wyngaarden resigned after 7 years at the helm because Louis Sullivan, President Bush's Secretary of Health and Human Services, wanted him out. As the Wyngaarden case illustrates, even a mandated 6-year term would not be sufficient to "depoliticize" a job that is, after all, a Presidential appointment.

Wyngaarden, however, is not out of work. This week he will join the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) as an associate director to presidential science adviser D. Allan Bromley.

Meanwhile, the NIH director's office is vacant and is likely to remain so for quite a while. ■ **BARBARA J. CULLITON**