edited by RICHARD STONE

Goldin's Future Tethered to Freedom

As one of the few holdovers from the Bush years, NASA administrator Daniel Goldin must have done something right. But so far there's been no word from the White House about whether he'll stay for good. Why? President Bill Clinton wants Goldin to prove he has the right stuff.

Science has learned that the Administration had planned to announce late last month that it was retaining Goldin, around the time it said it was keeping Food and Drug Administration Commissioner David Kessler and letting National Institutes of Health Director Bernadine Healy go. But at the last minute, say congressional and NASA sources, White House officials hedged their bets. Rather than make a pronouncement they might later regret, they decided to tie Goldin's future to his success in redesigning space station Freedom, reportedly by the end of May.

It's not clear how much Clinton wants NASA to cut from the project's $30 billion total cost, but judging from some of the radical options now on the table, it must be a lot. Goldin is reportedly considering whittling down the space station into a microgravity facility or teaming up with Russia to launch an upgraded version of space station Mir. But Goldin isn't complaining about the need to earn his wings under fire. His spokesman says Goldin now feels his prospect of staying is "at least as solid as any other appointee's."

RICK KOZAK

Hercules? Dan Goldin will have to clean NASA's Augean stable to keep his post.

Mystery Deepens on Indirect Costs

Does the Clinton Administration plan to cut sharply the amount of overhead that universities and government research labs can bill to Uncle Sam? Last week, that question drove panicked university presidents to pepper the White House and Congress with pleas to rethink what they fear would be a ruinous cut. Several days of intense lobbying, however, has established only that the indirect-cost picture remains murky.

The first hint of a new cap on indirect costs came in President Bill Clinton's economic plan, unveiled on 17 February, in which the White House projected a savings of $156 million in 1994 from an unspecified reduction in research overhead. National Science Foundation officials inferred that as a 22% cap on indirect costs related to administration—more restrictive than the controversial 26% cap proposed last year by the Bush Administration.

Then last week, word got out that the White House's Office of Management and Budget (OMB) was ready to cap *all* indirect costs—including maintenance of facilities, libraries, and other expenses—at 44% of direct research costs. Compared to the national average of about 50%, such a cap could save taxpayers a bundle—some $230 million at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) alone in 1994.

But as *Science* went to press, the evidence for a 44% cap was sketchy: Spokespersons at OMB and the White House's Office of Science and Technology Policy say the numbers remain in flux, pending the arrival of Clinton's budget request on 5 April. That leaves research officials in the dark about what the Administration has up its sleeve. "When you find out," says NIH budget officer Francine Little, "tell us. We have to implement it." Best guess at press time? The 22% figure is real; the 44% is hot air.

EMBL Council Resolves Thorny Questions

After months of debate, the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL) has elected a leader and settled on a home for its new DNA data center. At a meeting on 9 March, EMBL's governing council chose a Greek developmental geneticist—Fotis Kafatos—as the lab's new director-general, while selecting Cambridge, UK, as the site for its planned European Bioinformatics Institute (EBI). Britain won a competition with Germany and Sweden to host EBI.

EMBL staff feared that some council members would object to Kafatos' appointment, but instead the council accepted his nomination without demur. The reason: Shortly before the meeting, Kafatos himself headed off a potential row over his divided loyalty by giving up the directorship of a Greek research laboratory. Italian officials had criticized Kafatos for putting himself in a conflict of interest by trying to hold the Greek post and lead EMBL concurrently (*Science*, 29 January, p. 587). Kafatos will begin to work part-time at EMBL next month and has promised to resign a third job—a Harvard professorship—to devote his full attention to EMBL beginning next February. One of his initial goals is to intensify EMBL's research in developmental biology.

The EMBL council also decided to move the sequence databases at EMBL's DNA data library in Heidelberg to Cambridge to launch the expanded Bioinformatics Institute—a major effort that should be up and running within 2 years. Although a British bid to host the EBI faced strong competition, council members favored Cambridge because it will allow the institute to be built on the same site as the Sanger Center, a major new genome institute funded by the Wellcome Trust.

More Trouble for the Hubble

First it was the warped mirror, then jittery solar panels, then busted gyros. Now another piece of the orbiting telescope has blown out—one of its three "fine guidance sensors." These keep the telescope aimed at a target as it zips around the earth every 96 minutes.

Hubble scientists argue that the broken part, which they discovered last month, amounts to little more than a blown headlight. The telescope normally uses just two guidance sensors at a time, says Roger Doxsey, a Hubble expert at the Space Telescope Science Institute. But the loss is still a nuisance, he says. The sensors work by locking onto bright stars known as "guide stars." Each sensor scans a different field of view, but sometimes one will fail to find a star bright enough to use. That wasn't a problem when Hubble scientists could choose the best two out of three sensors, but the telescope scientists no longer have that luxury.

So far, no science has been scrapped, Doxsey says. But he adds that the problem has made it more complicated to schedule projects on the telescope, which, although plagued with problems, is in great demand among astronomers (*Science*, 12 February, p. 887). And there could be real trouble if a second sensor malfunctions. Bracing themselves for the worst, Hubble scientists have been experimenting with running the telescope on a single sensor, Doxsey says.

There's a chance the broken sensor can be replaced during the repair mission slated for the end of the year. However, NASA scientists concede, shuttle astronauts may not have enough time or cargo space to handle a new guidance sensor, considering all the other parts that need fixing. And the mirror repair itself is still in limbo: Earlier this week, a House science committee canceled a hearing on it because Hubble scientists were unprepared to present their plan.