

Congress Takes Up Banner for Biodiversity

Shortly before his term as president expired on 20 January, George Bush was expected to sign an executive order calling for the creation of a national center for biodiversity studies. But he never did. Now, 3 months later, Congress is dusting off legislation to establish the center by law.

Plans call for the center to compile information on animal and plant diversity throughout the United States. The bill supporting this proposal—identical to one that died in Congress last year—was introduced quietly in February by Representative Constance Morella (R-MD). How quietly? So much so that government officials involved in the Department of Interior's planned "national biological survey" were unaware of the legislation until contacted by *Science*.

Like Bush's order, the bill calls for the center to be housed at the



Biodiversity on the Mall? The proposed biodiversity center would be housed at the Smithsonian Institution.

Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., and would create a board of representatives of several federal agencies to oversee the center. But Morella's plan goes a step further than the proposed executive order: It would authorize the U.S. government to fund the center \$10 million a year for 3 years.

Congressional staffers say it's unclear when the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee will consider the legislation. That, in part, depends on how Clinton Administration officials at the Smithsonian, Interior, and the Environmental Protection Agency respond to the Republican-led legislation.

Day of Judgment Nears for tPA

It's a biotech executive's nightmare: After spending a few hundred million dollars to develop and market a genetically engineered drug, you find out that another drug 10 times cheaper works just as well. For Genentech Inc., this scenario could come true.

On 30 April, investigators

from Duke University and the Cleveland Clinic are planning to release the results of the Global Utilization of Streptokinase and tPA for Occluded Arteries (GUSTO) clinical trials, which pitted Genentech's tissue plasminogen activator (tPA) against streptokinase, which had been available for years. Both drugs dissolve blood clots, though tPA's

supporters have said that it works faster. The problem for Genentech is that two earlier trials suggested tPA may be no better than its rival at preventing deaths from heart attack.

Genentech isn't in any danger of losing money on tPA. The drug has earned about \$1 billion for the company since it hit the market in 1987, accounting for a third of the company's revenue last year. But since 1990, tPA sales have been declining. Genentech officials hoped to establish tPA's superiority with the GUSTO trials, which involved more than 41,000 heart-attack patients worldwide.

GUSTO scientists are keeping mum on the study's results. In the meantime, Genentech has prepared contingency plans in case the two drugs are shown to be similar in effectiveness. If that happens, tPA sales may drop, Genentech president and chief executive officer G. Kirk Raab told *Science*. "This would force us to be more disciplined in certain expenses, and inhibit the breadth of new product development," he says.

Former EMBL Chief to Lead Big Apple Lab

Call it a fair exchange. When the Heidelberg-based European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL) needed a new director-general, it recruited Harvard developmental geneticist Fotis Kafatos (*Science*, 18 December 1992, p. 1871). Now Swedish molecular biologist Lennart Philipson—whose sudden resignation as EMBL chief led to Kafatos' appointment—is crossing the Atlantic in the opposite direction.

Next month, Philipson will become the founding director of the Skirball Institute of Biomolecular Medicine in Manhattan, housed in a \$220 million center at the New York University (NYU) Medical Center. Financed from private sources—including Laurence Tisch, head of CBS, and the Skirball Foundation, a New York medical charity—the Skirball Institute is billed as the largest research facility to be built in the Big Apple in 20 years.

Philipson says the Skirball, due to open this fall, will conduct research mainly in neurobiology and developmental genetics. NYU medical officials hope Philipson can perform a reprise of his successful 11-year tenure at EMBL, which saw the lab rise to become one of the world's top molecular biology centers.

Suit Puts EMF Science on Trial

With the scientific community divided over whether electromagnetic fields (EMFs) pose a threat to human health, it's not surprising to find court dockets carrying lawsuits over the placement of high-tension power lines. Now the stakes have escalated beyond the neighborhood battles: Last week, a lawsuit blaming EMFs for personal injury became the first of its kind to go to trial.

The claim was filed by the parents of 5-year-old Mallory Zuidema, a San Diego resident who was diagnosed 3 years ago with Wilms' tumor, a cancer of the kidney that strikes fewer than one in 1 million children under age 15. The Zuidema family alleges that EMF radiation from high-tension power lines near their house caused Mallory's tumor. The suit, being heard in San Diego County Superior Court, seeks unspecified damages from the San Diego Power and Electric Company.

To support the claim, lawyers for the Zuidemas summoned to the stand two scientists and a physician. A key witness was biophysicist Abraham Liboff of Oakland University in Michigan, who described in vitro studies done in his lab showing that EMF radiation caused human cancer cells to multiply more rapidly than normal cells.

Defense lawyers dismissed the testimony of the plaintiff's experts as "junk science." Under cross-examination, Liboff acknowledged that "there's always a soaking-in for any new scientific theory," and that his own work was considered controversial within the scientific community. The defense also got a boost when the judge barred an oncologist from mentioning specific epidemiological studies done in Sweden and elsewhere that suggest a link between EMFs and cancer (*Science*, 11 December 1992, p. 1724), on the grounds that such discussion would be "hearsay." The trial is expected to conclude by 1 May.