

that day-to-day activities would not be affected by a change in contractors. In past cases of contractor changes at other DOE labs, he said, "the colors of the ID cards and paychecks may have changed, but the majority of the people have remained in their positions." DOE officials expect most of the SSC management staff to be rehired by the new contractor.

Since URA will operate the project when it is completed, it will retain control over the director's position, and URA president John Toll says that URA is reviewing the perfor-

mance of Schwitters and other managers. Last week, *The Washington Post* obtained a leaked memo in which DOE's SSC project manager, Joseph Cipriano, recommends the firing of Schwitters. Beginning with a sarcastic reference to "Our beloved contractor, Universities Research Association," the memo concludes that removing Schwitters "may be the only way to keep the lab from falling apart before the Senate votes." DOE officials say that the memo represents Cipriano's personal thoughts and does not reflect agency policy. Cipriano was on vacation and unavail-

able for comment, and Schwitters says that he has not been asked to resign.

In announcing the changes, O'Leary emphasized that the project has passed all its technical hurdles and is on track. But URA's management shortcomings had left the project open to attack. "Some will argue that implementing these changes is an acknowledgement of existing problems," she said. "It is." But she added that it would be worse "to know that the problems exist and do nothing to fix them."

—Christopher Anderson

## ACADEMIC EARMARKS

### Report Takes Aim at 50 New Projects

Delta College had a problem. Its planetarium, visited annually by thousands of elementary school students in the three-county area surrounding Bay City, Michigan, was more than 30 years old and no longer able to impress young minds with the wonders of the cosmos. The 2-year community college couldn't afford to build a new one, so Delta officials asked a local congressman, Bob Traxler (D-MI), for help. They went to the right person: Traxler was chairman of the House appropriations subcommittee that funds such research agencies as the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the National Science Foundation (NSF), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). While Traxler and his subcommittee were slashing hundreds of millions from the budget requests of those and other agencies, the chairman managed to find \$8 million in the 1993 NASA budget (added to \$750,000 allocated in the previous year) for a new planetarium at Delta, the first one that NASA has ever built.

Traxler, who retired from Congress in January after 18 years in office, was following an increasingly well-worn path of serving his constituents in higher education. In 1992 alone, Congress allocated more than \$700 million for such projects, and the total for the past decade exceeds \$2.4 billion. That's too much for Representative George Brown (D-CA), the chairman of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee, who vowed earlier this year to conduct a campaign to end the practice (*Science*, 19 February, p. 1117). This week Brown released the first product of that campaign, an interim report based on a survey requesting more information on 50 such projects funded last year by Congress, Delta's planetarium among them.

"The government and the taxpayer are the real losers as a result of this practice," Brown writes. "Politics as usual, in its most self-serving form, will destroy a collective effort to insure that our research agenda meets priority needs and invests our scarce

resources wisely." Brown also believes that the practice undermines the power of authorizing committees, such as his science committee, and strengthens the hand of the appropriations committee, whose 13 subcommittees oversee the entire federal budget. Authorizing committees are supposed to approve new programs and chart a broad path for federal agencies to follow, while the appropriations committee approves each agency's actual budget. Earmarks inserted by the appropriations committees cut the authorizing committees out of the action by spending money on projects that have not even been debated, much less authorized.

The survey by the science committee asked university presidents to explain the nature of each project being funded, the extent to which it was subjected to outside review, and whether it was requested by the relevant federal agency or authorized by Congress. In his report, Brown describes institutional responses ranging from smugness to not-too-subtle signals that they have powerful friends. Then there were those, presumably including Peter Boyse, the president of Delta College, who, Brown notes, "simply seemed baffled by the questions." "We are not clear of the meaning attached to the words 'peer review' and 'merit review,'" wrote Boyse. "The project was discussed, reviewed, and modified by several science teachers in the area, as well as by school administrators."

The interim report could be embarrassing to some members of the science establishment, whose institutions have benefited from earmarks at the same time they have publicly condemned the practice. As chairman of the National Science Board, which oversees NSF, James Duderstadt has repeatedly warned that earmarks threaten the government's attempt to support the best science. But as president of the University of Michigan, Duderstadt was forced to explain why Michigan has received \$700,000 since 1990 from a consortium of universities conducting a study of ozone air pollution. The

consortium, based at the University of Miami and known as the Southern Oxidants Study, has been awarded \$6.5 million in the past 2 years, and Michigan officials pointed out to Brown that their school was only a minor subcontractor.

In another example, Richard Atkinson, a former NSF director who is now chancellor of the University of California, San Diego, justified a \$1.6 million earmark for work on advanced composite materials by arguing that the project is a "unique way to advance the goals of defense conversion and regional economic development"—not academic research at all. Brown's report also lists a \$2.1 million payment for an agricultural biotechnology and genetics building at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, part of \$17 million that the university has been awarded in the past decade through earmarks. Until December its chancellor was Donna Shalala, now secretary of Health and Human Services, which includes the National Institutes of Health.

In conducting his crusade, Brown is stepping on the toes of some powerful members of Congress. The chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV), for example, has been a major figure in funneling \$100 million in the past decade to the University of West Virginia and the 1000-student Wheeling Jesuit College. But Brown says he's willing to pay the political price in return for reforms discussed in the report that would make earmarking more difficult, if not impossible. His report, for example, calls for a change in House rules prohibiting the appropriations committee from funding projects that have not been authorized, and it encourages agencies in the meantime to reject earmarks added to their appropriations bills with language that is not legally binding. "I am aware that this report runs the risk of offending respected colleagues or unfairly criticizing an institution performing important public services," writes Brown. "If I have so offended, I apologize. I only ask that the readers consider the larger issues we have tried to highlight."

—Jeffrey Mervis