

Congress Faces Busy Environmental Agenda

This fall shapes up to be a busy time for environmentalists as Congress prepares to consider everything from how to increase the U.S. market share of "green technologies" to stricter controls on radon and environmental tobacco smoke. But not all the talk will translate into action.

First the good news for the greens: Expect quick passage of legislation to create the National Biological Survey, an Interior Department bureau to inventory every animal and plant species in the United States (*Science*, 20 August, p. 976). The House Science, Space, and Technology (SST) committee plans hearings on how survey officials might inculcate the concept of peer review in Interior, but its concern is not expected to be a show-stopper.

Another Clinton initiative—a bill to elevate the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to cabinet status—faces rougher sledding. Representative John Dingell (D-MI) and other legislators want the bill to, among other things, mandate tight controls on EPA contracting. Meanwhile, Senator Bennett Johnston (D-LA) has proposed an amendment that compels EPA to base its risk assessments on "science," a provision, says a staffer, that agency supporters see as "unnecessarily intrusive."

From there, environmentalists' prospects head south. A bill to reauthorize the 20-year-old Endangered Species Act is likely to be derailed by "a contentious debate," as one staffer gently puts it, over whether to account for economic considerations when listing species as threatened or endangered. Look for this argument to spill into next year. And a proposal to establish the National Institute for the Environment to oversee extramural environmental research, co-sponsored by SST chairman George Brown (D-CA), needs "lots of work," according to an SST staffer. "Brown put [the bill] out there to get the discussion started," he says.



Fall on the Hill

When Congress returns on 8 September, it will sit down to a smorgasbord of legislation that affects research. The main course, of course, will be health care reform—Congress is sharpening its knives for the Clinton Administration's forthcoming proposal, which some observers believe could place restrictions on the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries and lead to cuts in corporate research.

In between health care bites, Congress will have plenty of science business to tackle. Officially, it must complete work this month on agency budgets for fiscal year 1994, which begins on 1 October. As usual, it's not expected to meet that deadline (see table), meaning some agencies anticipating budget increases will have to delay new programs and instead operate for several weeks on 1993 spending levels. In addition, Big-Science projects—as in the Superconducting Super Collider (SSC) and the space station (see accompanying story)—once again go on trial. The Senate is expected to vote later this month on whether to fund the SSC; earlier this summer the House voted to kill it. Even if the Senate approves the funds, a final verdict on the SSC won't come until a House-Senate conference later this year.

There's plenty more to get policy wonks' blood pumping (and maybe raise a pulse in nonpolicy types, too). Representative George Brown (D-CA) is expected to continue his antipork campaign (*Science*, 13 August, p. 823), and Representative John Dingell (D-MI) has his eye on the Office of Research Integrity within the Department of Health and Human Services as well as on legislation to elevate the Environmental Protection Agency to cabinet status (see accompanying story).

Space Station Should Get Tentative Nod

This fall, perhaps the most raucous debate in Congress about a science project will be whether to fund Space Station Freedom. The bottom line: The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) will win—with reservations.

The year of living dangerously has lasted a decade for the sta-

tion. Last year the House failed by a single vote to kill it; a subsequent vote imposed a 5-year, \$10.5 billion spending limit, in addition to the \$9 billion already spent.

Later this month the Senate will take up the issue when it debates NASA's budget. Analysts estimate some 14 senators are undecided but that the budget would pass by 10 votes if the vote were held today. A wild card,

however, is the redesign, which NASA expects to present to the White House on 7 September.

NASA's plans for Freedom—specifically the role of its foreign partners—are murky enough to pose an outside threat to the Senate vote. For instance, it's unclear to what extent NASA will involve Russia in the redesign. Russian help would be cheap, but it may disrupt the balance NASA has struck with other partners, says a European Space Agency official. Such ambiguity, sources say, could influence wavering senators to oppose the station.

NSF: What's in A Name?

Basic researchers who fumed last year when the National Science Foundation (NSF) appeared to embrace more applied research are expected to hit the roof when they hear the latest idea from Congress—giving engineering equal billing in NSF's name.

The House Science, Space, and Technology committee is drafting a bill to reauthorize NSF, a routine exercise meant to tweak the agency's programs. But this time around, legislators are questioning NSF's titular dedication to basic research—the reason the agency was founded 43 years ago. Committee staffers point out the agency has assumed more engineering responsibilities in recent years and will spend nearly \$400 million on engineering in 1993.

Time for a name change to reflect NSF's modern mission? Absolutely, the American Association of Engineering Societies testified before the committee this spring. Key legislators apparently agreed: Last month, staffers sent a letter to several scientific societies asking them how they'd feel about a "National Science and Engineering Foundation." So far, reaction has been negative. But unless research groups can make a compelling argument as to why NSF's title shouldn't reflect its broader mission, the new name may show up in the bill when it is introduced in the House later this month.

SCIENCE APPROPRIATIONS (millions of dollars)				
Agency	1993 enacted	1994 request	House bill	Senate bill
Advanced Research Projects Agency	2250	2162	*	*
Agricultural Research Service	661	668	695@	695@
Dept. of Energy: Energy Research	3046	3364	2930*	*
Includes SSC	515	640	220#	*
Environmental Protection Agency: R&D	508	536	536	*
Nat'l Aeronautics and Space Adm.	14,330	15,265	14,519	
Nat'l Biological Survey	142†	179	164	*
Nat'l Institute of Standards and Tech.	384	535	434	535
Nat'l Institutes of Health	10,339	10,668	10,937	*
Nat'l Oceanic and Atmospheric Adm.	1658	1863	1766	1919
Nat'l Science Foundation	2733	3180	3021	*

*Congressional action expected this fall; @conference report awaits approval by full Congress; * Pending further cuts; # shutdown costs; † programs gathered under survey this year.