edited by RICHARD STONE

Congress Seeks Answer to $20 Million Question

Amid stepped-up protests by AIDS activists and pressure from the White House, Congress may back-pedal on a $20 million appropriation it awarded the Department of Defense (DOD) in October 1992 to test a therapeutic AIDS vaccine being developed by MicroGeneSys Inc.

The award, criticized for bypassing scientific peer review, led a National Institutes of Health (NIH) panel to recommend the money be used to compare several therapeutic vaccines that aim to delay onset of disease in HIV-infected people. But DOD decided to plan a single-product trial, outraging researchers (*Science*, 13 August, p. 819).

Now Congress is feeling the heat. On 17 September, staff of Representatives Henry Waxman (D–CA) and John Dingell (D–MI) discussed the trial with Kristine Gebbie, White House AIDS policy coordinator, and officials from DOD and NIH. Afterward, Gebbie wrote Waxman that a "single-vaccine trial is not a useful investment at the present time" and stated it "would be far wiser to allow an appropriate review process to identify more basic research questions."

This pleased Waxman, who would like the trial scrapped and the money redirected to general AIDS research. He introduced an amendment on 30 September to the Defense appropriations bill that gives DOD, NIH, and the Food and Drug Administration 6 months to call off the trial.

The House bill passed, and its fate now rests with a House-Senate conference expected to occur shortly after *Science* went to press.

DONNA BINDER/IMPACT VISUALS

Chain reaction. ACT UP protesters bicycle-locked themselves to the gate of MicroGeneSys' Connecticut headquarters on 30 September to oppose a $20 million trial of the company's AIDS vaccine.

A New Cut of Pork, More or Less

Later this month, President Clinton is expected to announce the first few projects to be funded under a new program to put military technologies to civilian use. But the Technology Reinvestment Project (TRP), now entering its second year, seems likely to be a mixed blessing for the thousands of scientists hoping to get a slice of one of the fastest growing federal R&D programs.

Part of a larger effort by the Clinton Administration to shift the U.S. economy to a post-cold war footing, TRP is expected to fund projects ranging from advanced communications to green technologies. The House last week hiked the program's 1994 budget by $100 million, to $575 million, but also reserved about 40% of the money for a few dozen "porkbarrel" projects that will be funded without having to compete against other proposals.

Already TRP has attracted a lot of attention: The first solicitation drew nearly 3000 proposals asking for a total of $8.5 billion. The response nearly overwhelmed program managers at the five participating agencies—the departments of Defense, Energy, Commerce, the National Science Foundation, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration—and the announcement of 1993 winners was delayed until later this month.

Meanwhile, efforts are afoot to de-pork TRP. Representative George Brown (D–CA) has temporarily thwarted the porkbarrelers with legislation to prohibit funding TRP projects that aren't awarded competitively. But Brown expects his colleagues to find another way to fund the projects. If they succeed, next year's growing pot of TRP gold will be almost half-empty before any scientist gets to apply for it.

EPA Readies New Science Strategy

Any number of advisers have told the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that it needs to do a better job of basing its policy and regulatory decisions on good science. Soon EPA administrator Carol Browner will have a blueprint for doing just that: Her staff is reviewing recommendations from a task force on improving science at EPA, and is expected to prepare an agenda for Browner by the end of the month.

Scientists long have complained about gaps in EPA's research portfolio, the over-reliance on contract researchers by the agency's Office of Research and Development (ORD), and, perhaps most important, an inability to incorporate sound science in decision making.

The task force, co-chaired by EPA science adviser William Raub and ORD staffer Wilbert Wilson, last month submitted a report to EPA deputy administrator Robert Sussman, who is responsible for concocting the new recipe for EPA science, subject to approval by Browner. According to an EPA official, the strategy is expected to emphasize "communication"—improving the links between ORD, the EPA's program offices (which develop regulations), and the public.

Stanford Wins Bid to Build B Factory

Stanford has defeated Cornell in a bid to build a premier high-energy physics facility—a $230 million particle accelerator known as the "B factory." Earlier this week, Department of Energy (DOE) Secretary Hazel O'Leary announced her selection of the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center (SLAC), a DOE laboratory some physicists feared would close if it failed to win the contract.

Cost appears not to have been the deciding factor in SLAC's triumph. In July, an outside panel said Cornell's design would cost about half as much to build as SLAC's. But in a statement on her decision, O'Leary says DOE deemed SLAC's design a safer bet. DOE has a "higher margin of confidence in the SLAC proposal's ability to meet its stated budget, schedule, and performance objectives than we do in the Cornell proposal's ability to meet these goals," she stated.

MIT physicist Stanley Kowalski, who chaired the outside panel, told *Science* he stands by its conclusion that Cornell's plan was cheaper and that neither proposal carried insurmountable risk. Cornell's project leader, physicist Karl Berkelman, says he was insulted by O'Leary's statement; he insists SLAC's design confers no technical advantage over Cornell's. SLAC director Burton Richter says he's "extremely pleased" with the decision.

O'Leary's statement acknowledges that DOE considered nontechnical factors in its decision —such as how the B factory could help SLAC survive. California legislators said in a statement the decision "avoids the possibility of 200 to 300 layoffs at SLAC."

Physicists hope to use the B factory to create B mesons, particles that could shed insight on the asymmetry in nature that gave rise to a greater amount of matter than antimatter in the universe. SLAC will get the final green light to begin building the B factory after a study of the project's environmental impact.