gram over 7 years. Some of the funds came through congressional earmarks, and some after DOE agreed to request the money to get then-Idaho Senator James McClure "off their back," as Griebenow puts it. Other groups were outraged. Researchers at MIT and the New England Medical Center complained that his earmarking took funding away from their own BNCT projects and from others in the field, and in 1990 a review by the Institute of Medicine concluded that BNCT was "not ready for clinical trials."

Eventually, something had to give. Griebenow's aggressive advocacy had become an "embarrassment" to DOE, says one federal official. In 1992, the agency announced the creation of the National Center for BNCT Measurement and Development, which would focus on developing boron compounds and neutron-generating accelerators rather than reactor-based sources. It then launched a national search for a director with a background in chemistry, which effectively eliminated Griebenow, according to DOE program manager Jon Nadler. In January, Griebenow resigned and took a position at Idaho State University to start the university consortium.

The consortium—a collection of nine U.S. universities*—wants to convert a research reactor at Georgia Tech and start BNCT clinical trials by 1996. Griebenow says he intends to continue seeking earmarked funds for a portion of its budget because DOE does not support clinical trials.

The consortium appears to be politically well positioned. The nine universities are represented by six members of the Senate appropriations committee. The newest member of the consortium is the Medical University of South Carolina, whose president is James Edwards, energy secretary under President Ronald Reagan. Peter Fischinger, a former NCI deputy director who heads the university's Hollings Cancer Center, says the university does not expect to receive funds from the consortium this year but is prepared to seek earmarked funds in the future. "Do I like this [funding] approach? No. But I don't see how this can be galvanized otherwise," he says.

Brown says he will fight the very earmark he supported earlier this year when it returns to the House floor, but he hopes it will be killed by House-Senate conferees. Bevill, he says, "is fully informed from numerous sources this is a questionable activity, and not just because it's an earmark. It's a questionable program."

Whatever the outcome, Brown says he's learned something from the embarrassing incident. "I'm drawing the conclusions that I don't sign any more letters before reviewing them much more carefully than I did in this case," he says. And that's not all: "I'm also going to try to continue educating my colleagues not to earmark, even if I ask them to."

–Christopher Anderson

*The members of the BNCT University Consortium are: Idaho State, Montana State, Purdue, Emory and Washington State universities, the universities of Washington and Rochester, the Medical University of South Carolina, and Georgia Institute of Technology.

ACADEMIC FACILITIES

NSF's Construction Program Grows Up

For years, research universities have begged Congress to create and adequately fund a program to renovate the nation's aging laboratories, citing a $10 billion backlog of crumbling bricks and mortar. This month they claimed a small victory—a doubling, to $100 million, of the budget for a competitive program begun in 1990 at the National Science Foundation (NSF) to pay for lab renovation and for large scientific instruments. The Senate seems willing to go even further: The report accompanying its budget bill tells NSF to ask for $250 million in its 1995 budget request. And the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology is now considering some radical proposals to enlarge NSF's facilities program, along with a draconian measure aimed at stamping out congressional earmarks, an unsavory offshoot of the dire need for construction funds.

The vehicle for these proposals in the House is a reauthorization bill for NSF, approved last week by the science subcommittee. (The House is expected to complete action on the bill this fall, although the Senate won't take up comparable legislation until next spring.) It would give the foundation at least $150 million for its facilities program in fiscal year 1995, which begins on 1 October 1994, and $200 million in 1996. The measure, proposed by subcommittee chairman Representative Rick Boucher (D–VA), would effectively make the facilities program NSF's top priority by requiring the appropriations committees to allocate these funds even if the rest of NSF's budget has to be cut to accommodate them.

Boucher's proposal is applauded by lobbyists for research universities, although they are skeptical that NSF alone can solve the problem. "I think it's a promising development," says Howard Gobstein of the Association of American Universities, a group of research universities that opposes earmarking despite the fact that some of its 58 members have benefited from the practice. "Although we'd prefer the full authorization [The bill would allow NSF to spend up to $250 million], those levels might be sufficient as part of a broader government-wide facilities program." But NSF officials are wary. "We have some problems with that provision," says Ray Bye, who heads NSF's congressional relations office. "Our priorities are people and programs, and this approach distorts that order." The proposal is also expected to stir debate in Congress because it chips away at the authority of the appropriations committees to allocate money to each agency.

Boucher's bill would also prohibit universities that receive congressional earmarks—funds awarded without agency peer review—from competing for funds from NSF's facilities program. If that provision had been in effect this year, it would have excluded almost one-third of the 56 institutions that received a total of $37 million last month in NSF's third round of awards. The "double-dippers" include the University of Alabama, Birmingham, which received $1 million in competitive funds from NSF to renovate a chemistry lab after having collected $57 million in earmarks over the last decade for research facilities, and Tufts University, which added almost $2 million from NSF for its chemistry facilities to some $46 million already awarded in earmarks.

The ranking minority member on the subcommittee, Representative Sherwood Boehlert (R–NY), plans an amendment containing a more drastic solution—a ban on all NSF funds, including those for research and training, for those institutions that receive earmarks. Although the full committee is likely to reject the idea later this month, it demonstrates the depth of congressional concern about a practice that last year cost the government $760 million.

The House reauthorization bill also asks the director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy to develop a government-wide plan for a facilities program, of which NSF would be a part. The idea for such a program has already spread to the National Institutes of Health, whose 1994 budget will contain $7 million for an extramural construction and renovation program operated through the National Center for Research Resources. Last month NIH awarded $5 million in grants for a more limited program created last year, and this spring NIH received authority to spend up to $125 million a year.

Such activity points to a further expansion of programs to fund university facilities. But unless Congress is especially generous, the funding is unlikely to match the amount universities are now getting via the pork-barrel route.

–Jeffrey Mervis