edited by RICHARD STONE

DAVID M. DOODY/UNIPHOTO

In from the cold? Congress wants more research on violence and homelessness.

NSF Considers a Violence Center

Should research on the origins of violent behavior be off limits to basic science? Even as some critics charge that such research would reflect racial bias, a powerful player may soon invest in the field: The National Science Foundation (NSF) is considering establishing a center for violence studies. It must report to Congress on a decision by 1 May.

This year, NSF intends to spend about $1.5 million on violence research, including projects on how testosterone influences violent behavior and how homelessness influences criminal behavior among the mentally ill.

Now Congress is pushing NSF to expand its horizons. Last January, Senator Barbara Mikulski (D–MD) and Representative Louis Stokes (D–OH), chairs of the relevant appropriations subcommittees, urged NSF to "study the feasibility and desirability of establishing an interdisciplinary science and technology center focused on violence research." According to congressional aides, the idea is to steer federal agencies away from new methods of locking people up and toward research on the societal factors behind violence. "We have enough information from diverse studies on subjects like aggression and law enforcement to start to integrate approaches and get a more comprehensive view," says Susan White, director of NSF's Law and Social Science Program.

However, the idea of an NSF center rankles some at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). "What we need now is action, not more basic research," says Jim Mercy, acting director of CDC's Division of Violence Prevention, which spends about $12 million a year on violence research, mostly on violence prevention. Mercy says he'd rather support "policy-relevant and prevention research."

A Thaw in Russian Science Aid?

It's been 2 years since the United States promised Russia a $100 million aid package to help keep Russian scientists working at home and not in labs run by renegade governments like Iraq's. Now, at last, Russia may see some of that money: Later this week the vehicle for the western funds, the Moscow-based International Science and Technology Center (ISTC), is expected to award its first round of research grants.

For months, the Russian Parliament blocked funding for the ISTC, because politicians suspected it could become a vehicle for Western surveillance and because some found it humiliating to accept western money (*Science*, 10 September 1993, p. 1380). It became "the little program that couldn't," says Ashton Carter, the assistant secretary of defense for nuclear security and counterproliferation. "It was very frustrating." Then the situation began to ease last November. Russian President Boris Yeltsin, after dissolving the Parliament, unilaterally approved the ISTC funding, freeing the western parties to review proposals. Earlier this week, the ISTC board of governors was expected to pick 75 winners.

The United States has committed $25 million to the ISTC; the rest comes from Japan and the European Community. The U.S. funding is part of an $800 million package approved by Congress 2 years ago—much of it frozen by U.S. politics until 1993—to help Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan dismantle weapons programs.

But despite the ISTC's recent success, its long-term prognosis is unclear. Carter warned in a meeting with reporters last week that Russia's new parliament may still weigh in on the issue. If it is anything like the old one, it could shut the program down again before any more grants are awarded.

Egypt to Build Science City in Desert

Egypt is known for building on a grand scale—witness the Great Pyramids and the Aswan Dam. Now it has launched an ambitious construction project for science: The government has broken ground on the Mubarak City for Scientific Research.

In the mid-1980s, the Egyptian Science Ministry proposed a campus of eight applied research institutes to "solve problems of national interest," such as engineering cotton plants to resist insects, says Kamel Ahmed, cultural and education counselor at the Egyptian Embassy in Washington, D.C. Conceptually, Kamel says, the institutes are modeled after the European Molecular Biology laboratory. Named for Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, the city will be located on the Desert Road between Cairo and Alexandria.

Last fall, however, the government decided it had only enough money to begin building one institute; a scientific panel gave highest priority to the National Institute of Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (NIGEB). The institute is a big investment for the Egyptian government, which has budgeted 100 million Egyptian pounds ($36 million) for its construction. For comparison, Ahmed estimates the government spends less than $1 million a year on academic research; Egyptian science, he says, is supported mainly by foreign grants. About 400 scientists will work at NIGEB, which is expected to be up and running in 18 months, Ahmed says. After the institute is completed, the government plans to start building institutes for materials science and information research.

Russia Drops Charges

Last week, the Russian government dropped its case against chemist Vil Mirzayanov, who was charged in October 1992 with revealing state secrets about chemical weapons research. The case had drawn a storm of protest from western scientific organizations, which argued that the whistleblower's actions were justified under international treaties (*Science*, 25 February, p. 1083).

Hot Words Over Indirect Cost Freeze

A proposal to require universities to share in the belt-tightening for the 1995 fiscal year has kicked up a storm of protest—though budget experts say it may not even accomplish its goal of shrinking next year's federal deficit. The Clinton Administration wants to freeze the amount of overhead it pays universities and other nonprofit institutions (*Science*, 4 February, p. 599), and academic managers are steaming.

Last week, Cornelius Pings, president of the Association of American Universities, wrote an angry letter to John Gibbons, the president's science adviser, and Alice Rivlin, associate director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), calling the plan "bad science policy, bad public policy, and flawed budgeting" and raising the specter of legal action on grounds that the freeze would breach existing agreements. At the same time, the Congressional Budget Office has calculated that none of the estimated savings of $130 million will occur until after universities close the books on fiscal 1995 and calculate how much they owe the government.

Last week the House passed a budget resolution that includes the 1-year cap for institutions receiving more than $10 million a year in federal research grants, and the Senate is expected to follow suit next week. But the real action won't start until May, when each body's 13 appropriations subcommittees begin carving up the $542 billion pot of federal discretionary spending. That's when agencies will be told how—and whether—they must impose limitations on indirect costs for campus-based research.