

## NATIONAL LABORATORIES

# DOE Reacts Coolly to Galvin Report But Favors Downsizing

It's open season on the Department of Energy's (DOE's) \$6 billion network of major laboratories. Even its defenders agree that the labs, a legacy of the Cold War, have grown bloated and that DOE's approach to managing them must be streamlined. But that consensus has not yet been translated into a clear strategy, leaving the next step in the hands of Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary and a senior management team that will draw up a plan in the next several weeks and submit it to the White House and Congress. "The system is too large, and it must be made more efficient," says O'Leary. "That's downsizing, and there's no way to avoid it."

Last week, a 19-member task force led by Robert Galvin, chair of Motorola, weighed in with a radical proposal to set up a non-profit corporation that would be free of DOE and congressional meddling. "The current system of governance of these laboratories is broken and should be replaced with a bold alternative," Galvin said, presenting the results of the panel's year-long study of the labs (*Science*, 27 January, p. 446). The panel doesn't give O'Leary much help in making quick savings, however: It recommends no lab closings, although it does suggest that most nuclear-weapons work be transferred from the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory to its older rival, the Los Alamos National Laboratory.

The task force's chief proposal is to establish a corporation, headed by a board of trustees appointed by the president; contractors would run each laboratory as a subsidiary of the larger organization. No such arrangement now exists, Galvin says, but the report cites public-private bodies such as the Mitre Corp. and the Federal National Mortgage Corp. as examples of creative approaches. He says the change could save DOE as much as 50% in administrative costs.

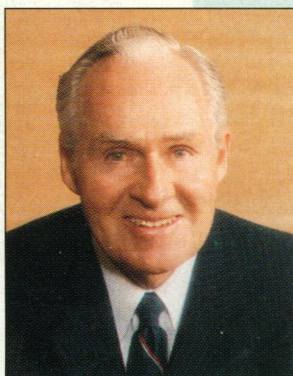
The idea, however, was met with incredulity by policy-makers at a 1 February meeting of the DOE secretary's Energy Advisory Board. "It's a dream world. It's not going to happen. You're just wrong," said Butler Derrick, a member of the board who just retired from Congress after 20 years as a Democratic representative from South Carolina. O'Leary was more polite. "Your vision will be difficult

to implement," she told Galvin. Other DOE officials and congressional staffers doubted the government would funnel billions of dollars in taxpayers' money to the labs after losing control and oversight. While O'Leary embraces the report's "goals," she says the terms corporatization or privatization can simply mean more businesslike operations. "There's no fire sale of these laboratories," she adds.

A less controversial alternative—included in an appendix rather than the main body of the report—is to continue to have DOE

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**—Robert Galvin**



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oversee individual contractors but make deep cuts in department and laboratory bureaucracies. And a third approach, a hybrid of the two, is already attracting some support. A board of senior DOE officials and industry representatives would be given overall responsibility for the lab system; contractors would continue operating the labs on a day-to-day basis. "You don't have to privatize to get this result," Energy Undersecretary Charles Curtis told *Science* about the plan, which was proposed by John McTague, a Ford Motor Co. vice president and member of the secretary's Advisory Board. Nicholas Samios, director of Brookhaven National Laboratory, agrees. "With a high-level group like that, you could wipe out a lot of bureaucrats."

But the Galvin task force says lab directors must be prepared to cut their budgets if they want to get the government off their backs. The labs should stop scrambling to come up with new missions to justify their funding, according to the report, and there should be some consolidation of existing activities. The most sweeping consolidation would be the shift of nuclear materials development and production work from Livermore to Los Alamos, which the panel says

should take place over the next 5 years.

Nuclear weapons work has been the core of Livermore's activities for more than 40 years; the Galvin panel calls for the lab to maintain competence in the field and focus on nonproliferation efforts. The panel also recommends building the National Ignition Facility at Livermore, a \$1.8 billion project of powerful lasers for a host of civilian and defense tasks, from astrophysics to nuclear stockpile stewardship. The facility "will reinforce the weapons design capability" at Livermore, the report states.

But the proposal to consolidate most weapons work at Los Alamos promises to generate a fight. Taking Livermore out of the loop of any nuclear weapons efforts "would be a very big mistake," says physicist Edward Teller, a Livermore founder. "The loss of competition would be a great tragedy." Livermore's director, Bruce Tartar, would not discuss the specific recommendation, but in a written response to the Galvin report he predicted that "the details of some individual program elements—particularly in laboratory responsibilities—will turn out differently" from the task force's prescription. Tartar met with members of Congress last week to discuss the lab's future.

As *Science* reported on 27 January, the Galvin group also warned the labs not to make cooperation with private companies a central mission. "The laboratories should not aspire to become research boutiques for industries," the report states. O'Leary says such cooperation was never a major mission for the laboratories, although she has campaigned to strengthen the ties between the labs and industry. The panel also decried the rise in technology transfer funding at the expense of basic science, which Galvin and his team said should remain the main focus of the laboratories.

For the next few months, however, the focus will be on how to reorganize the disparate set of laboratories. A new General Accounting Office study criticizes the lack of coordination among the labs and urges the secretary to come up with clearer missions and other ways to manage the complex of 10 labs that employ 50,000 people, including almost 20,000 scientists.

Members of Congress had kind but vague words last week for the report; they are expected to be more specific during hearings this month and next that give Galvin and O'Leary a chance to lay out their positions. At the same time, the bipartisan push to decentralize government and reduce spending is almost certain to lead to important changes in a system once largely invulnerable to outside scrutiny and budget cuts. "There are no sacred cows," says Energy Deputy Secretary William White. "The price of beef has gone up too high."

**—Andrew Lawler**