

NASA, Academy to Re-Examine EOS

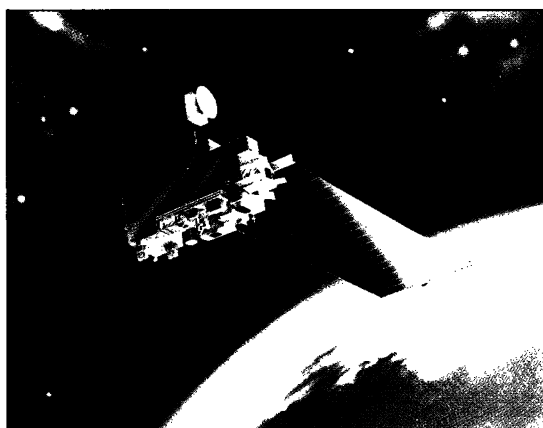
It's supposed to monitor the planet's health, but so far the only readings from the proposed multibillion-dollar Earth Observing System (EOS) are readings of a different environment: the political climate in Washington.

The latest development is a new round of reviews, by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, of NASA's plans to launch a fleet of satellites beginning in 1998. The reviews, now getting under way, are in response to a request by Representative Robert Walker (R-PA), chair of the House Science Committee, and are part of a Republican effort to scale back the global-change research program, which is a favorite of Vice President Al Gore.

The reviews are expected to lead to a less costly and less ambitious EOS, the most expensive piece of the government's global-change program. NASA now estimates EOS will cost \$7.3 billion through 2000, roughly half what the agency had planned in the late 1980s, but that number is likely to drop further as a result of the reviews.

Walker has criticized NASA for using politics rather than science in deciding how to build EOS. In particular, House staffers say, Walker objects both to Gore's environ-

mentalist stance and to the program's focus at Goddard Space Flight Center, in the home state of the project's biggest congressional backer, Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD). In a 6 April letter to NAS President Bruce Alberts and National Academy of Engineering President Robert White, Walker pro-



Shrinking satellite. The EOS program may be headed for yet another downsizing.

posed that the academy's Board on Sustainable Development consider whether NASA's current plan serves scientists well and whether other countries or private companies could share the cost.

But Walker does see the program's advantages. He notes in his letter that the global-

change program "could make significant contributions to the improvement of scientific understanding of the Earth system" and help scientists "understand the fundamental nature of climate change." And NASA officials believe that the reviews, seeking ways to cut costs and improve the quality of data beamed back to Earth, could give it added scientific credibility in the looming budget battles. For example, Representative George Brown (D-CA), ranking minority member on the panel, says, "There's every indication that the Republicans will want to drastically reduce or possibly eliminate [EOS]."

Walker wants the academy's results no later than September, around the time Congress wraps up the 1996 budget. John Perry, staff director of the board's global-change research committee, told *Science* that this schedule "is a fast track, but it can be done." The committee has begun sifting through a list of potential panel members. Walker wants NASA's review to be finished this summer, he said in a 6 April letter to NASA Administrator Daniel Goldin.

Goldin rejects Walker's charge of politicizing EOS but is not averse to some of his proposals; he met with him to discuss the reviews before Walker sent his letters. Gore's interest in EOS has prevented the administrator from making more sweeping changes to the program, according to administration and congressional sources. Now, thanks to Walker, Goldin has another chance to make the program conform to his mantra of cheaper, faster, and better.

—Andrew Lawler

SCIENTIFIC PUBLISHING

Germans Buy Nature's Publisher

Nature, which to its chagrin is often referred to in the United States as "the British journal," acquired a new international patina last week. On 12 April, the giant German publishing company Verlagsgruppe Georg von Holtzbrinck GmbH of Stuttgart bought a majority 70% share in *Nature's* parent company, Macmillan Limited of London. The takeover happened just one month after Macmillan announced another big change for *Nature*—longtime editor Sir John Maddox is retiring later this year.

Neither Macmillan nor Holtzbrinck is revealing the reasons for the buy-out, but both publishing houses are expected to gain from the takeover. "Under present management [Macmillan's] profitability has not been as great as might have been hoped," says former U.S. *Nature* publisher Robert Ubell, who is now president of Robert Ubell Associates, a scientific publishing consulting firm in New York. A managerial input from the German company could push up Macmillan's profit margin, he says. Meanwhile, Holtzbrinck "is

building an enormous empire of trade ... and prestigious scientific and technical publications," says Ubell.

Nature, which has a circulation of 55,000, isn't the first science magazine to join the Holtzbrinck stable. In 1986, Holtzbrinck bought the popular monthly *Scientific American*, which has an English-language circulation of 650,000. A press statement distributed in Germany talks about possible collaboration between the two publications, but their vastly different styles will limit the types of ventures that will be possible, says John Hanley, CEO and chair of *Scientific American*, and the member of the von Holtzbrinck executive board who oversees scientific publishing. "*Scientific American* is a consumer magazine, and *Nature* is a peer-reviewed journal," he says. "Nevertheless, the two names have a certain magic," says Hanley, and the two publications may choose to co-sponsor seminars or one-shot publications, such as updates on cancer therapies or AIDS.

Holtzbrinck—which is privately owned—began as a humble *Leserkreis* (literally reading circle) company that circulated scarce books and magazines by mail in postwar Germany. Now the company has an annual turnover of DM 2.2 billion (about \$1.6 billion) and makes a solid profit, in large part from regional German newspapers, a German weekly business magazine, and a German daily business newspaper; the company also owns several American publishing houses, including W. H. Freeman and Worth Publishers, which publishes science textbooks.

Until the takeover, Macmillan was owned by the Macmillan family (one of the more illustrious members being former British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan), which will retain a 30% stake in the company. Established in 1843, Macmillan is the largest privately owned publishing company in Britain. Its other holdings include two paperback lines, Pan and Picador, in the United Kingdom, and St. Martin's Press books in the United States.

—Rachel Nowak