

REINVENTING GOVERNMENT

NASA Panel Would Drop Ames Lab

Ames Research Center in Mountain View, California, would be largely turned over to the private sector under a plan developed by a team of senior managers at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). The recommendation is the biggest change to emerge from an intensive review ordered by NASA Administrator Daniel Goldin to help the agency survive the coming lean budget years. A draft of the plan, which was obtained by *Science*, will be presented to Goldin in the next few weeks.

Under the plan, NASA's science efforts would undergo a major reorganization. Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama, for example, would give up most of its extensive microgravity and materials science work, while Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland, would assume a stronger science role—despite a 15% reduction in its research budget.

The report, from a team led by Richard Wisniewski, NASA's deputy chief of space flight, took as its starting point a white paper prepared by Goldin's office in February (*Science*, 3 March, p. 1259). But Wisniewski's group—called the Zero-Based Review Team—rejects many of the proposals in the white paper, including having a contractor immediately run the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. It also rejected a suggestion to have Pasadena's Jet Propulsion Laboratory oversee all of NASA's basic space science, recommending instead that it remain in charge of planetary science missions.

Yet the review team does recommend abandoning the status quo in the case of Ames, which has 1678 employees and a budget of \$602 million. Ames' aerospace facilities, which make up 60% of its operations, would be transferred to longtime rival Langley Research Center in Virginia, while work on the space station centrifuge, a key research tool for the orbiting base, would go to Johnson Space Center in Houston. A private science institute or consortium focusing on space biology would be set up at the site.

Ames' future hinges in large part on NASA's ability to negotiate a deal with local universities, including Stanford University and the University of California system, agency officials say. NASA is eager to turn over much of Ames' oversight to an academic or industry contractor.

The panel also follows the recommendation of the white paper that Marshall close its Spacelab control center and transfer future operations of the Advanced X-Ray Astrophysics Facility to a private institute. The team rejected proposals from Marshall to consolidate all microgravity and life sciences management at the center; it would con-

tinue to conduct a small amount of biotechnology research.

In the draft plan, Goddard would take on hydrology and space science work now done at Marshall. But it would transfer control of spacecraft operations to Johnson and turn Wallops Flight Facility in Virginia into a private suborbital launch site. The team also urges the center to halt funding for contractor scientists and find a university to

take over the Goddard Institute for Space Studies in New York City. Lewis Research Center in Cleveland would take on the lead role for microgravity science—much of which now is done at Marshall—and eventually create a separate, private institute to do the work.

Because of their implications for federal spending, the proposals promise to raise the hackles of some members of Congress. And even if they can spread the pain enough to win support for their plan, NASA officials say it will take at least 2 to 3 years for the financial benefits to kick in.

—Andrew Lawler

AAAS COLLOQUIUM

Partisan Politics Comes to the Fore

Partisan bickering and somber budget news greeted participants at last week's Washington symposium on science and technology sponsored by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (publisher of *Science*). Highlights of the 3-day meeting are as follows:

■ In his keynote address, John Gibbons, the president's science adviser, came out swinging against the Republicans. He says he fears "extremists in Congress" with a "fundamental disregard for reinvestment in science and technology" will prevail in their efforts to reshape the budget. Republican efforts to trim industry-government partnerships, he added, are "a ruthless attack on this nation's future." In the rush to cut budgets, says Gibbons, "it sometimes seems that some members in the new Congress don't want to be confused by the facts." He also sharpened his qualified disapproval of a proposal by Representative Robert Walker (R-PA) for a Department of Science. "The Administration unequivocally opposes the creation of a Department of Science of the kind now being discussed in Congress," says Gibbons, adding that it would impose "a command-and-control model of rigid bureaucracy."

■ The only sure thing about next year's budget for the National Institutes of Health (NIH), says Michael Stephens, a House appropriations committee staffer for the Democrats, is "uncertainty." But Stephens was willing to make his own forecast. For the year beginning 1 October, he predicted, there will be "no radical change" in NIH's funding, with its 1996 budget staying within 5% of its present level of \$11.3 billion. Although some of the Republican proposals to cut taxes could mean a 15% decline in NIH's budget, says Stephens, "I don't think that will happen," because he

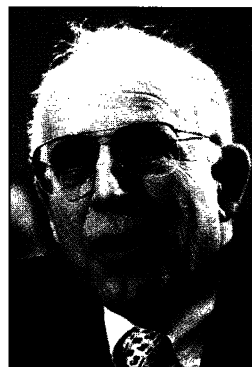
doubts Congress can both make large tax cuts and balance the budget.

■ Representative Roscoe Bartlett (R-MD)—one of the very few members with a Ph.D. in science—pleaded for patience with the new Congress, particularly the push to focus on basic rather than applied research. "I know it's a little bit traumatic," said the congressman, who has a doctorate in physiology from the University of Maryland. "But science and R&D generally are going to do better after this transition." Bartlett also confessed that his party does not always practice what it preaches. The hydrogen research bill introduced by Walker, chair of the House Science Committee, and passed by the panel includes provisions to fund applied research, Bartlett noted. "We're going to make some mistakes," he added.

■ The National Science Foundation faces tough sledding, warns Doc Syers, a staffer for Representative Jerry Lewis (R-CA), who chairs the House Appropriations subcommittee that oversees NSF and other science programs. Members in their first or second terms, who make up more than half the House, "don't see the constituency" for NSF "and haven't been through the rigors of the peer review process" and, therefore, do not understand the high quality of NSF research, he says. As a result, Syers predicts that they

will target NSF in an effort to reduce the deficit and cut taxes. One Republican member of the subcommittee, for example, showed Lewis how he could trim 20% from the budget of each agency in the panel's jurisdiction, and Lewis told NSF Director Neal Lane to think about what a cut of that size might mean. Syers predicted that NSF can expect at best a level budget, particularly given its 129% increase over the past decade.

—Andrew Lawler and Eliot Marshall



Fighting words. Gibbons fears GOP "extremists" will gut science budgets.

RICK KOZAK