

ert Walker (R-PA) agreed that it would be hard to find any buyers.

Two days after the hearing, the committee approved a bill proposed by Walker that would rescue most of Commerce's science efforts, although it would still make major reductions, including the sale of NOAA's oceanographic research fleet. His plan bundles NOAA's research efforts, satellite arm, and the National Weather Service into a new Science and Technology Administration. Not coincidentally, the new entity would look a lot like the core of the centralized science agency that he has championed.

The Science Committee's effort is just one of many steps, however. Each House panel is free to prepare its own version of the Chrysler bill before passing it along to the Government Reform Committee, which is acting as ringmaster. And there is a lot of action under the circus tent. Other panels besides Walker's are proposing new bureaucracies—such as a U.S. Trade Administration—that will keep intact the parts of Commerce over which they have jurisdiction. As of last week, House committees had proposed four new administrations, and two more could be proposed this week. Although each plan promises a more svelte federal bureaucracy, the array of proposed new organizations led one Commerce official to scoff, "It doesn't seem like consolidation to me."

If the Government Reform Committee is unable to come up with a single bill, then the Budget and Rules committee will hammer out its own version—with heavy input from the House leadership. Chrysler is hoping for harmony: "Certainly it's going to be a consensus among a majority of us," he says. But congressional staffers say consensus may be elusive, as the final bill must balance the conflicting interests of committee chairs and freshman members.

The situation in the Senate is even more fluid. Senator William Roth (R-DE), chair of the Government Affairs Committee, is leading the charge to eliminate the department, but he will be moving shortly to succeed Senator Bob Packwood (R-OR) as head of the Finance Committee. And congressional staffers say some senators are reluctant to attach a plan to eliminate Commerce to a bill that limits spending on entitlements—the vehicle for any government reform this year. The last and potentially most serious obstacle is President Bill Clinton. Brown warned Walker's panel that the White House will veto legislation that kills the department.

All this casts doubt on the earnest attempts by freshman Republicans to take a broom and dustpan to the department. Of course, an untidy but intact Commerce Department would be just fine with many legislators. Says Ehlers: "Everybody needs a hall closet."

—Andrew Lawler

## GLOBAL CHANGE

# Report Backs Science, Chides Politicians

Good science, poor political leadership. That's the conclusion of a panel, assembled by the National Academy of Sciences, that looked at the U.S. government's global change research program. The panel's report, issued last week, rebuts charges from some Republicans that the program was designed by Democrats fixated on a fear of global warming; it says the research explores fundamental questions about geophysical forces on Earth. But the panel's criticism is bipartisan: It says the interagency effort has not gotten sufficient attention from the White House, and it criticizes legislators from both parties for not providing adequate and reliable long-range funding. The report also faults researchers for failing to provide clear direction for the interdisciplinary effort.

The report, requested by Representative Robert Walker (R-PA), who chairs the House Science Committee, comes amid mounting complaints on Capitol Hill (*Science*, 1 September, p. 1208). At the center of the controversy and the academy review is the Earth Observing System (EOS), a constellation of environmental monitoring satellites planned by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). The panel backs NASA's overall plan through 2004 but suggests changes in the multibillion-dollar data system and in one of the constellation's three large satellites. NASA Administrator Daniel Goldin says these changes could save \$6 billion from an estimated cost of \$33 billion through 2022. But the panel rejects calls by some House Republicans to delay or scale back the project.

"We don't have any problems with these findings," says William Townshend, NASA deputy associate administrator for Mission to Planet Earth, which includes EOS. "We got a proceed-without-delay signal." NASA officials intend to respond quickly to that signal. In January they hope to present a revised EOS plan that takes into account the findings of the panel, chaired by mathematician Berrien Moore of the University of New Hampshire. Physicist Edward Frieman of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in La Jolla, California, chaired the board that oversaw the work, which was on a fast track: The report is based on a July workshop and was completed in 5 months.

The thorniest problem for NASA is how to alter the EOS data system. NASA has plans for nine large data centers operated by the government, but the panel recommends

letting academia and the private sector compete for the work. "Its management must be open and community-based" to make sure that researchers have fast and complete access to data from space with a minimum of bureaucracy, the report concludes, citing as models the Internet and the World Wide Web. Frieman acknowledges that local politicians will fight this, but he argues that the revised approach will lead to better science. "You can't just stuff a bunch of money in a brown paper bag and say do it," he says.

The panel dismissed charges by some members of Congress, notably Representative Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA), that politicians are

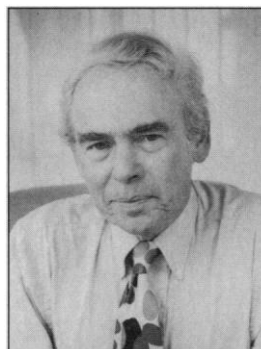
setting the agenda. "It's not getting politically torqued," says Frieman. But the report does not let the Administration off the hook, either. "There has not been as much leadership in [the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP)] as there was in the past," says Moore. "It's been more like benign neglect." Robert Watson, OSTP's environment chief, admits that the Administration may have focused on other newer multi-agency programs at the expense of global change, and he

notes that OSTP Director Jack Gibbons met with agency managers last week to review the problem. Even so, Watson warns that "we can't put global change on a pedestal at the expense of other initiatives."

The academy panel also urged Republicans and Democrats to set aside their differences over policy for the sake of improved oversight. "We're not asking all tigers to become pussycats," says Frieman, "but there is a lot that could be done to better coordinate this." But neither side has retracted its claws. Walker said the review confirms many of his concerns and called its critique of management "the most ominous message of the report." At the same time, staff members of Representative George Brown (D-CA), ranking minority member on the committee, faxed reporters what they called a "reality check" that juxtaposed the panel's findings with Walker's public statements on the topic.

Moore says such political sniping is discouraging, but he sees the program's strong support among senators from both parties as a moderating influence. "I realize we're sailing upstream," he says, "But both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue [the White House and Congress] have to begin working together, or we will waste a lot of money."

—Andrew Lawler



**Global harmony.** Scripps's Frieman says program needs a coordinated effort.