Science. "He's looking backward."

Democrats in the House and Senate welcomed the speech, but some want Clinton to take an even stronger stand by saying that R&D is a high priority in deciding whether to veto a specific bill. Representative George Brown (D–CA), the ranking minority member of the House Science Committee, said that he and other minority lawmakers planned to meet this week with Clinton Chief of Staff Leon Panetta to make their case. But Brown was annoyed with the fact that they must first have an audience with Panetta before meeting with the president. "That in itself shows we don't have a hell of a high priority," Brown says.

The mere prospect of a presidential speech on science and technology set off a scramble among agencies and White House officials. Commerce Department officials, for example, sent their own version of the talk to Clinton's speechwriters; they wanted the president to be more critical of cuts in specific programs, according to Administration sources. Meanwhile, staffers at the Office of Science and Technology Policy—who wrote the first draft of Clinton's message—favored a speech that emphasized broad themes without getting into nitty-gritty budget details. The result appeared to be a compromise between the two approaches, with Clinton mentioning Commerce's $430 million Advanced Technology Program that is threatened by Republicans, while also speaking generally about the importance of science and technology.

At the same time, White House officials defended their boss against criticism that R&D programs are not important in making veto decisions. "Our commitment on this issue has been clear from day one: We are philosophically opposed to people cutting out whole areas of research," says Greg Simon, Gore's domestic-policy adviser. He said that science and technology issues are discussed daily in meetings with senior White House officials and that the Administration has made a major effort to preserve the Commerce Department (*Science*, 22 September, p. 1664). "I don't know what else to do," he quipped, "[except] have a march on Washington." Senator John Glenn (D–OH) also defended the president, saying that he's convinced the White House will fight for R&D programs at the bargaining table.

With congressional supporters of R&D clamoring for attention, the president's aides emphasized that the fate of research programs is only part of a broader battle between the White House and Republicans. "The whole house is on fire," says Simon, "and [science and technology] is just one room."

–Andrew Lawler

NEUROSCIENCE

Center for the Mind Pleases the Senses

LA JOLLA, CALIFORNIA—Picture this: a scientific institute with 32 relatively young fellows, all of whom receive ample funds and have no need to apply for grants. No one has any teaching responsibilities. Theoreticians and experimentalists alike are welcome and nurtured. Lunch is served each day in a communal dining room, where the fellows can mix with an endless stream of distinguished visiting researchers. Now set all of this in a $16 million architectural wonder discreetly built into a hillside on the Torrey Pines Mesa that is already home to the Scripps Research Institute, the University of California, San Diego, and the Salk Institute for Biological Studies. Sounds like a dream? Well, it was until 15 October, when the Neurosciences Institute (NSI) cut the ribbon on what it bills as its new "monastery for science."

The abbot is Gerald Edelman, who shifted into neuroscience after winning a Nobel Prize in 1972 for his work in immunology. Edelman's monastery has been a long time evolving. It began in 1981 as an offshoot of the Neurosciences Research Program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Edelman, then at Rockefeller University in New York, was appointed head of the nascent NSI, a retreat where scientists could discuss a specific idea with a few colleagues for a few days. "It's been a way to get away from quotidian projects, like answering the phone," says biochemist W. Einar Gall, research director of NSI since it started. "It's a very nice opportunity to get together in a workshop setting," says Carla Shatz, a Howard Hughes Medical Institute investigator at the University of California, Berkeley. "They provide a unique service."

To date, more than 900 scientists from 24 countries have passed through NSI, but the institute is now more than just a retreat for visiting scientists. Beginning in 1988, it began to hire a handful of full-time fellows. Four years later, with Rockefeller in some turmoil as then-President David Baltimore tried to overhaul its structure, Edelman left and took a job as chair of the department of neurobiology at the Scripps Research Institute, which became temporary home while NSI laid plans for a more grandiose center across the street. Since then, it has grown to 32 full-time researchers who are fully funded by the institute to pursue their individual projects for up to 4 years. Chosen for their scholarship, creativity, and problem-solving skills, the fellows have a range of interests that, NSI boasts, "represent practically every field of modern neuroscience."


BILL TIMMERMAN

Brainy design. NSI's eye-catching new buildings opened last week on a mesa outside La Jolla.

NSI is largely funded by the Neurosciences Research Foundation, a nonprofit established in 1962 that is supported by corporations, other foundations, and private donations. Although NSI is an independent institute, Scripps owns its facilities (NSI has a 35-year lease) and footed most of the construction bill. Sandoz Pharmaceuticals also chipped in $5 million for construction costs and promised another $5 million a year for operating expenses, in return for the rights to develop products stemming from NSI research.

Edelman's own work focuses on what he calls "neural Darwinism," the theory that populations of neurons develop individual networks through a Darwinian selection process. But Edelman—who emphasizes that his work is supported by the National Institutes of Health, not NSI—is quick to say that the institute doesn't exist to further his own scientific ideas. "There are guys here who actually believe in neural coding," Edelman says, referring to the theory that neurons are genetically coded to make specific connections, just as transistors are wired in a preset pattern. "I think that's insane. But they're good guys."

The model for the current incarnation of NSI is the Rockefeller Institute—before it became Rockefeller University and lost a culture that makes Edelman wax romantic: "There was a sense that you had a lot of time. The whole style was terribly impressive to me." The Rockefeller of yesteryear, he says, also mixed the old and young. "You could sit next to René Dubos or [Oswald] Avery at lunch. ... That exposure was tremendously influential." On top of these luxuries, Edelman says people weren't pigeonholed. "You were not characterized as a specialist," he says.

Whether the new NSI can create the type of environment Edelman remembers—and whether it can survive without federal funding—is anyone's guess. But at least this dream is going to get a reality test.

–Jon Cohen