

## NCI AIDS Budget Under Microscope

Once again, the intramural AIDS research program at the National Cancer Institute (NCI) is on the griddle. This time, the chef is the Gay Men's Health Crisis, a New York-based AIDS advocacy group, and the main dish is a spicy 35-page report that details—for the first time—how NCI divvied up the \$172 million it allocated to intramural AIDS research in 1994. "It's a very scholarly report," says Alan Rabson, NCI's deputy director.

The analysis includes a breakdown of how much AIDS money each NCI principal investigator (PI) received last year and how many citations each one has on the AIDSLine papers database. More than

\$5.5 million was spent on researchers who have no citations whatsoever on AIDSLine.

Part of the problem, as a cri-

tique of NCI known as the Bishop-Calabresi report pointed out last spring (*Science*, 26 May, p. 1121), is that many investigators' work has AIDS applications but is not primarily focused on the disease. One glaring example is John Schiller, a respected papillomavirus researcher (see table). Rabson says NCI is now cutting back Schiller's AIDS dollars.

SOURCE: GAY MEN'S HEALTH CRISIS

PI	Lab	Budget (millions)	AIDS Cites
W. Blattner	Viral Epid.	\$3.63	59
S. Tronick	Cell. & Mol. Biology	\$1.95	14
G. Franchini	Tumor Cell Biology	\$1.84	75
S. O'Brien	Viral Carcinogenesis	\$1.72	11
R. Gallo	Tumor Cell Biology	\$1.65	518
J. Lautenberger	Molecular Oncology	\$1.47	9
G. Shearer	Exper. Immun.	\$1.37	87
J. Schiller	Cellular Oncology	\$1.10	0
P. Pizzo	Pediatrics	\$1.05	88
F. Rusceti	Leukocyte Biology	\$0.98	9

Another eyebrow-raising finding is that NCI's intramural program sucks up 81% of the institute's \$212 million AIDS budget. That, too, will soon change, says Rabson, in part because three of the 10 best funded researchers have since left NCI. "We're hoping to move considerable amounts of that money to extramural grants," says Rabson.

## Fossil Bill Has Scientists Fuming

Legislation that would allow amateur and commercial fossil collectors to dig on federal lands is stirring up dust among paleontologists, who argue that unskilled collectors will destroy sites and plunder them of fossils that belong in museums.

Only academic paleontologists and their trainees can obtain permits to collect fossils on federal property. But the Fossil Preservation Act, soon to be introduced by Representatives Tim Johnson (D-SD) and Joe Skeen (R-NM), would permit anyone to take fossils from the surface using hand tools in areas not containing "sci-

entifically unique" fossils. It would also allow amateur and commercial collectors to excavate on federal land if they signed an agreement with an overseeing research institution and promised to turn over to the area's manager any "scientifically unique" find. Marion Zenker of the American Lands Access Association (ALAA) says the bill would curb "the horrendous loss of fossils ... due to weathering."

Paleontologists, however, have been blasting the bill on the Internet, saying that while there's a need for a new fossil law, the proposal lacks tough penalties and provisions for strong oversight. Jerry Harris, a graduate student at Southern Methodist University, warns that amateurs without proper training could damage specimens or sites. And David Krause, president of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology, says he has "very grave concerns" that the bill will allow fossils that should be in museums to go instead to private collections. The term "scientifically unique" is murky, he says, and "signifi-

cant fossils are not necessarily unique." A staffer for Johnson says he is "cautiously optimistic" that the bill will pass this Congress. The ALAA also hopes for a companion bill in the Senate.

## Biomedicine Loses a Friend in Congress

Next year is shaping up to be a watershed in Congress, as 12 senators and 15 representatives have said they will not run again. Included in this departing flock is a strong supporter of basic biomedical research, Senator Mark Hatfield (R-OR), now chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee. Hatfield, 73, announced on 1 December that he will retire and move to Oregon's coast.

Often at odds with his own party's agenda, Hatfield never in his five Senate terms voted for a defense authorization bill. Meanwhile, he's given a "lifetime of support to biomedical research," says a longtime congressional staffer. The aide believes that "support for the National Institutes of Health is broad but thin" in Congress, and it isn't clear who, if anyone, will become NIH's next "white knight" in the Senate. Another aide notes that Hatfield played a critical role this year in pushing the Senate budget process to allocate \$1.5 billion more than the House wanted in the bill that includes funding for NIH.

## Defense Bill Backs EPSCoR, Hits Labs

Tucked into the \$243 billion defense spending bill that President Clinton reluctantly signed last week are two provisions that inadvertently line up with recent advice from the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) to make peer-reviewed, academic research the government's highest priority (*Science*, 1 December, p. 1430). One preserves a \$20 million program that gives university scientists in have-not states seed money to vie for federal grants, and the other slashes \$90 million from the military's \$1.1 billion pot for its contract labs.

The state aid plan, called the Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR), is part of an \$80 million multiagency effort that began in 1978. Congress overrode the Defense Department's attempt to kill the program, keeping its current level of funding. "We did pretty well considering the rest of the budget," says Stu van Scoyoc, a lobbyist for EPSCoR states. But the holiday season is a lot bleaker for scientists at the Pentagon's R&D labs: Congress cut \$90 million from that account for the third straight year. One of the largest, the \$275 million Lincoln Laboratory in Lexington, Massachusetts, is bracing for a cut of \$20 million to \$25 million, says a spokesperson. That's on top of a 21% decline in staff, to 2200, since the early 1990s.

While the defense bill helps parts of academia, it ignores an NAS plea to hold the line on science and technology funds, cutting basic research by 4%, to \$1.17 billion. And by giving defense \$7 billion more than the Administration requested, the measure puts the squeeze on pending bills that fund civilian research.



**Prehistoric loot?** Law would affect protection of fossils such as this, from a hoofed mammal in Oregon.

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