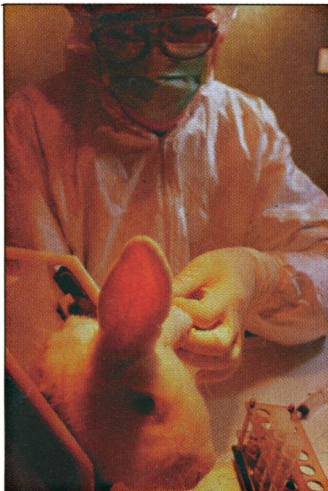


edited by JOCELYN KAISER



D. VO TRUNG/PHOTO RESEARCHERS

**Sight becoming rarer?** Panel wants quick federal action on replacing animal tests.

## Panel Backs Animal Testing Alternatives

An interagency committee looking at ways to reduce the use of animals in testing is planning to call for common nonanimal criteria that would be acceptable to all federal agencies.

Even though dozens of methods have been developed to reduce or replace animal tests, most agencies are willing to accept substitutes only on a case-by-case basis. For instance, although the Department of Transportation has approved using a collagen matrix in place of rabbit skin to test for corrosivity, the method's manufacturer, In Vitro International, "has had to go from agency to agency to submit its application," says William Stokes of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

Stokes co-chairs a panel, created in response to a 1993 law, that has drafted guidelines for a government-wide process for determining whether new in vitro tests are scientifically valid and could substitute for animal tests. At a workshop last month, industry and animal welfare activists endorsed the plan, which calls for establishing a permanent committee to oversee peer review of protocols. The final report will be submitted in May to the heads of the 15 participating agencies, and supporters hope that the new committee can be formed in time

to be funded in the 1997 fiscal year that begins next fall.

Cosmetics and other industries have a strong economic incentive to use in vitro tests. In 1998, many consumer products will be banned by the European Union if they are tested on animals, and industry officials say it would be impractical to use different methods to test a product sold in both the United States and Europe.

## Tech Program: Half-Full or Half-Empty?

An upcoming report on the Commerce Department's threatened \$320 million Advanced Technology Program (ATP) seems likely to provide fodder for both sides in the fierce debate over the government's role in helping high-technology industries.

The General Accounting Office (GAO) report—which won't be submitted for several weeks—was done at the request of the House Science Committee when the Democrats were in control. It examined whether companies that applied for ATP grants and received high marks from reviewers, but no funding, went ahead anyway with the research. An inability to continue the work, argue ATP supporters, would point up the need for continued

government support.

Mary Good, undersecretary of commerce for technology, who has seen a draft copy, says GAO found that "50% [of the 28 companies surveyed] did, and 50% did not, and that's significant." A majority of small firms and industrial consortia abandoned the idea, Good says, and even those that went ahead "are doing it on a different [slower] time frame. And speed makes a big difference if you're trying to remain competitive in today's markets."

But Good's favorable analysis isn't likely to convince one of ATP's biggest opponents, Representative Bob Walker (R-PA), now chair of the House science panel. Walker is fond of citing similar data from an earlier GAO report—in which half of ATP winners said they "probably ... would have pursued the development of the technology" without government support—to argue that ATP is a form of corporate welfare. "They decided that since the money was there, why not get it?" he said recently on the TV show *Technopolitics*.

Given the tension between the White House and Congress over budget matters, it's a safe bet that the two sides will also find different messages in this latest analysis of the ATP program.

## Shutdown Leaves NASA Largely Unscathed

Contractors and civil servants at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) were breathing a sigh of relief this week after Congress and the White House agreed on a temporary budget deal (see p. 136). Money is flowing again after a 3-week government shutdown, which forced NASA to plan halting space station work on 8 January and suspending the space shuttle program after the mission slated for launch late this week.

The deal came just in time, ensuring that a host of scientific satellites will face no major development delays and guaranteeing there will be enough workers to get the shuttle into orbit and monitor the mission, NASA managers say. With the 10th anniversary of the Challenger disaster approaching, NASA and its overseers in Congress were keenly aware that the funding squeeze might endanger safety.

But unlike some other agencies, NASA is unlikely to experience dramatic long-term impacts, officials say. The vast majority of the agency's \$14 billion budget goes to contractors paid on a quarterly basis, so work on large spacecraft built by industry, such as the first Earth Observing System (EOS) satellite, was not interrupted. And although the government was officially closed, many civil servants were at their desks at Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland, which oversees the EOS effort.

NASA's other major space science center, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, stayed open during the shutdown because it is run by contractors. But agency officials have asked the lab, which runs the Cassini mission to Saturn slated for launch next year, to rank work by priority, says NASA public affairs chief Laurie Boeder. If Congress and the White House fail to fund the agency beyond the self-imposed 26 January deadline, she adds, NASA intends to be prepared for another shutdown.

## New Director in Sight for NIMH?

A 20-month search for a director of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) appears to have narrowed to a single candidate: Steven Hyman, associate professor of psychiatry and neuroscience at Harvard Medical School. An M.D. at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH), Hyman heads a list compiled by NIMH's search committee. In addition to teaching, he directs the lab of molecular and developmental neuroscience at MGH and heads a campuswide program called the "Mind/brain/behavior interfasculty initiative." According to Hyman's office, Hyman visited the National Institutes of Health's campus in Bethesda last week at the invitation of NIH Director Harold Varmus and may have been caught in the weekend blizzard as he tried to return home by train.

Hyman told *Science* that he's excited about the possibility of coming to NIMH, but has yet to make up his mind. One complicating factor, he says, is that "we are a two-career family." His wife, Barbara Bierer, heads the pediatric bone-marrow transplant program at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and Children's Hospital in Boston. NIMH has been without a permanent director since Frederick Goodwin stepped down in the spring of 1994. Rex Cowdry, director of NIMH's neuroscience center at Saint Elizabeth's Hospital in the District of Columbia, has served as acting chief and is also on the search committee's short list of candidates for permanent director.