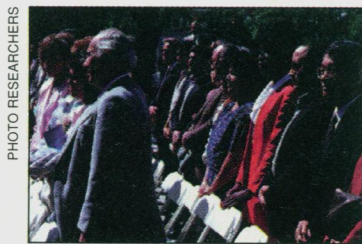


## New Limits on Scientific Immigration?

Congress may soon consider changing the rules for legal immigration, and the prospect that it could endorse strict new limits on people with technical skills is dividing the scientific community.



**Unfair competition?** Universities and some scientists are at odds over curbs on immigration.

In general, university and industry leaders defend current quotas, while some engineering societies and a group of young scientists are pushing for tighter limits.

This debate takes place in the wake of a recent increase in science and engineering immigration, which shot up 80% between 1991 and 1993 to about 23,500 persons per year. Congress raised quotas in the early 1990s to remedy a purported shortage of U.S. technical workers. As noted last month in *Science & Government Report*, lawmakers are now looking at plans that could reverse that earlier decision. A bill sponsored by Senator Alan Simpson (R-WY), S. 1394, would lower the cap on skilled workers from 130,000 to 90,000 and require employers to pay a fee for each worker, including those with temporary visas of a type held by postdocs (H1-B). The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers is backing the bill, as is the recently formed Network of Emerging Scientists (NES), a subset of the Young Scientists' Network.

Universities and computer companies want a weaker Simpson bill and support an alternative that would increase the skilled quota slightly, sponsored by Representative Lamar Smith (R-TX). David Goodstein, vice provost of Caltech, confirms that the "prevailing view" among ac-

demics is that "it's contrary to the ethic of scientific research" to keep out foreign talent.

But Jennifer Cohen of NES, a physicist who hasn't had a permanent job in 2 years, says Congress "shouldn't be basing changes [on claims] of any short-fall." Many scientists favor lower quotas, she thinks, but immigration "is almost a forbidden subject," and few "are willing to say anything." Simpson's plan is in committee and should reach the Senate floor in a few weeks.

## NSF Friends Seek Spending Hike

The National Science Foundation (NSF) is still waiting for a budget to cover the last 8 months of the current fiscal year. But NSF may benefit from an unannounced proposal to add \$40 million this year to its current \$2.23 billion research budget. Although the plan is a long shot, the fact that it's being considered suggests that NSF still has some important friends at the White House and on Capitol Hill.

Science has learned that the \$40 million request was on a list

of \$2.5 billion in additional spending sent earlier this month by the White House to the Senate subcommittee that oversees spending for NSF and several other agencies. It is a result of ongoing talks between the panel and the Office of Management and Budget, says Ernest Moniz, the new associate director for science at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. "NSF is a bellwether for the health of university research," says Moniz, "and the request indicates that peer-reviewed, academic research is a priority with this Administration."

A Senate aide says "there's a lot of support" on the spending subcommittee for raising NSF's budget. The problem, he says, is that the panel doesn't have any more money to spend, and the Administration hasn't suggested any offsetting cuts. NSF officials say that they're not counting on more money, but they welcome the proposal as a sign of the Administration's continued commitment to basic research. "Even if it doesn't happen," says one official, "it certainly can't hurt us for [the] 1997 [budget]."

## NIH Budget Trouble for AIDS Office?

When Congress decided 2 weeks ago to throw the National Institutes of Health (NIH) a lifeline and rescue it from the continuing budget morass, it may have inadvertently wrapped the rope around the neck of the NIH's Office of AIDS Research (OAR).

At issue is whether the NIH funding deal includes a plan by Representative John Porter (R-IL) to take away OAR's power to direct AIDS research funds. Congress gave the OAR authority over NIH's AIDS budget—now at \$1.4 billion—when it set up the office 3 years ago. But in August, Porter, who chairs the House panel that oversees NIH funding, pushed through a measure that gives AIDS money directly to each NIH institute. The subsequent Senate version of the bill, however, allowed OAR to retain its budget authority, leaving its fate in limbo.

That might have changed on 5 January, when Congress voted to fund NIH through fiscal year 1996 (*Science*, 12 January, p. 136). Although Porter told the House that "we have left all matters other than the overall funding level for NIH to be resolved through negotiations with the Senate," the resolution also states that NIH should be funded at the rate specified in the House bill. Then again, the resolution also says the money should be spent "under the authority and conditions" that it was given in fiscal 1995. "Legally, people could have a variety of interpretations," says one House appropriations aide.

President Clinton previously has vowed to "oppose any effort to undermine" OAR. NIH Director Harold Varmus will only say that the matter "is unresolved." A final resolution likely will come when lawyers at the Office of Management and Budget review the resolution's language over the next few weeks.

## OSTP Empties

With President Clinton's first term coming to a close, some officials are bailing out. Robert Watson, associate director for environment in the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), says he will soon take a job with the World Bank. And Administration sources say that Jane Wales, who heads OSTP national security and international affairs, also will be leaving to work for the Rockefeller Foundation. During the past year, Watson found himself locked in battle with House members skeptical of the federal government's global change research. An atmospheric chemist, he was previously chief scientist for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Mission to Planet Earth. Wales is a former journalist and official with the Carnegie Corporation.

## NIOSH Gets Reprieve

A surprise winner in the budget deal hashed out to fund certain agencies through 1996 was a small branch of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). CDC and the National Institutes of Health also got unexpected gifts—budget increases of 1.5% and 5.7% respectively. But unlike these favored programs, NIOSH—a \$132 million sliver of CDC's \$2.1 billion 1995 budget—had come under criticism from House Republicans, who claimed it duplicated work by other agencies. While a Senate panel agreed to give NIOSH a slight budget hike over 1995 as requested by the president, the House targeted it for a 25% cut. But the appropriation signed by the president 2 weeks ago gave NIOSH a \$1.9 million increase, a budget boost of 1.4%.

NIOSH trains workers in safety and researches injury prevention at its labs in Cincinnati and Morgantown, West Virginia.

