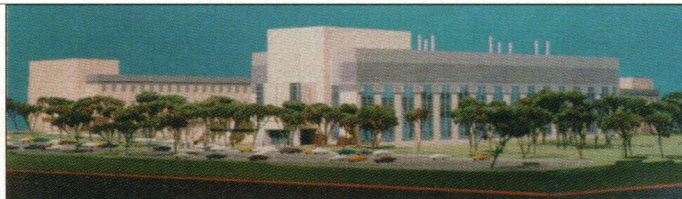


## NIST Takes Hits In the House

A last-minute agreement between two House lawmakers last week would wipe out the Advanced Technology Program (ATP), renewing a battle between the House and Senate over the industrial research program. Legislators also eliminated a \$105 million request for laboratory construction at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), which runs ATP.

The House Appropriations Committee had approved a 50% cut in ATP's current budget, to \$111 million in 1997, and told NIST officials to spend the funds only on small businesses. But Representative Harold Rogers (R-KY), who chairs the appropriations panel with NIST oversight, amended the bill on the House floor to say that the money must be used for "closing



**Absolute zero.** The House has frozen funds for NIST's advanced chemistry lab, for which ground was broken this week.

out all commitments."

Rogers's move came at the urging of Representative Robert Walker (R-PA), whose Science Committee this year refused to authorize funds for a program that Walker criticizes as corporate welfare. "The ATP office consistently defies congressional intent to end the program by announcing new competitions," Walker said. "Programs like the ATP must be erased."

This is the second time Walker has tried to rub out the program. Senate supporters revived it last year, and the White House has requested \$345 million in fiscal

1997, arguing that ATP is the centerpiece of its efforts to strengthen technology bonds between industry and government.

The NIST construction account would be frozen until questions about how previous construction funds were handled are resolved and officials review long-range building plans. Meanwhile, on 29 July, Maryland lawmakers and institute officials gathered to break ground for a new chemistry laboratory. Senate appropriators were expected to vote this week on NIST's budget as part of a broader bill.

## NASA Scales Back Headquarters Cuts

NASA Administrator Dan Goldin surprised and angered agency employees and Congress this spring when his top managers proposed slashing Washington headquarters staff next year from 1460 to a mere 669. But now that number is up to 951, the result of months of internal haggling and external pressure.

The new plan, announced last week by Deputy Administrator Jack Dailey, includes a major reshuffling of NASA programs.

The agency will eliminate two offices—space access and technology, and space communications—and create a new position of chief of technology, Dailey told the NASA Advisory Council last week. Exobiology work will remain under the purview of the space sciences shop; managers in the life sciences and microgravity office lost their bid to oversee the program. But Dailey added that NASA intends to devote more resources to biological sciences in general.

Goldin's goal is to turn

NASA's Washington operation into a corporate headquarters, providing greater autonomy for the dozen NASA centers scattered across the country. "We've put tremendous power in the hands of the center directors—but also tremendous accountability," Dailey says. Only one office in headquarters will get bigger—the administrator's. "You don't think we would take a cut, do you?" Dailey joked to panel members. Goldin is expected to sign off on the changes sometime next month.

## Agencies Look to Improve Informed Consent

The U.S. government is launching a \$6 million grants program to improve its system for telling participants what to expect if they take part in research. The effort comes in response to a 1994 presidential panel that found "serious deficiencies" in certain areas of the process used to protect human subjects involved in experiments.

The new program will award 3-year grants for research on ways to help potential participants fully understand a study's purpose, methods, procedures, risks, and benefits. It will be funded jointly by the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Energy and run by NIH, says Susan Solomon of the

NIH's Office of Extramural Research. Ruth Faden, a bioethicist at Johns Hopkins University and chair of the presidential panel, says she's "delighted the government is taking real action," although she cautions that the community of researchers who use human subjects are the only people who can make a real difference.

Solomon said the NIH will announce the program in September on its home page (<http://www.nih.gov>) and in the *NIH Guide for Grants and Contracts*, with applications due next spring. For more information, e-mail Solomon at [susan\\_solomon@nih.gov](mailto:susan_solomon@nih.gov).

## Antarctic Panel Is Flexible on Spending

The chair of a new panel being formed to look at the U.S. Antarctic program says its mandate to sustain quality science includes the option of requesting additional funding for the program.

"Good science is the objective—within constraints imposed by the harsh environment and fiscal realities," says Norman Augustine, CEO of Lockheed-Martin, who has agreed to head up a 10-member panel of scientific, technical, and management experts who will report to the National Science Foundation (NSF). "Our baseline is today's level of funding, but we have the flexibility to consider other options."

The biggest single question facing the panel is whether NSF, which runs the \$196 million program, can afford to rebuild its 20-year-old South Pole station. The National Science Board, NSF's oversight body, has endorsed a \$181 million replacement station, but NSF so far has failed to win Administration approval for such an expenditure.

The Augustine panel is conducting the latest in an ongoing series of reviews of the Antarctic program, which has received high marks from scientists. Last spring a White House committee found that the nation was getting good value for its money but asked NSF to seek outside advice on the best way "to sustain a high level of scientific activity under constrained funding levels" (*Science*, 10 May, p. 803).

The panel's work will include a trip to Antarctica this fall. "I think it's critical to understand the conditions facing scientists there," says Augustine, who visited the continent several years ago as a private citizen. He expects the committee to submit its report in early 1997, too late to shape NSF's 1998 budget submission but in advance of congressional action on any request to rebuild the station.