



UNIVERSITY OF TSUKUBA

Not the sticks. Japan says researchers in Tsukuba Science City don't deserve a bonus.

Tsukuba Researchers To Lose Hardship Pay

Japanese researchers who get hardship pay for working in the new city of Tsukuba may be about to lose their special status. Japan established the "Tsukuba allowance" 25 years ago to compensate scientists for enduring the move to what was then a rural farming area 60 kilometers from Tokyo where the government was creating a science city. The allowance adds 10% to the salaries of some 9800 employees of national labs in Tsukuba and costs the government about \$55 million annually. But Japanese officials point out that Tsukuba is no longer an undeveloped backwater.

Not surprisingly, the cut is opposed by Tsukuba employees, laboratory heads, and even the local chamber of commerce. Hiroshi Kawasaki, an official

of the union of Tsukuba national lab employees, says that the area's cost of living—unlike most Japanese, Tsukubans need cars—still merits additional compensation. But Yoshiyuki Furuta, an official with the National Personnel Authority, says that the allowance was meant to compensate those who had to move or commute from Tokyo in the early years. "It was not intended to continue for eternity," he says.

A plan to terminate the Tsukuba allowance is included in a bill to be put before the Diet soon after elections scheduled for later this month. If it passes, the allowance will be cut off in the spring of 1999. Regardless of the election outcome, Tsukuba employees are not very hopeful. "The Japanese Diet usually follows the bureaucrats' lead," says the union's Kawasaki.

ICSU Report Launches Reforms

The group that represents the world's scientific community—the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU)—is considering a broader mission: serving as a scientific advisory body for governments around

the world. The idea of molding the 65-year-old organization into a global version of the U.S. National Research Council is part of a sweeping package of reforms suggested by an outside panel that the Paris-based group has put on a fast track (*Science*, 14 June, p. 1575).

The panel's report, which was presented to ICSU's General Assembly in Washington, D.C., last week, also calls for shifting ICSU's research grants from support for ongoing activities to short-term seed money for promising ideas. It's an economy move triggered in part by a 58% cut this year in the \$480,000 U.S. contribution to the \$1 million program. The international panel, chaired by engineer Roland Schmitt, also recommends eliminating the ICSU's 46-member oversight committee and beefing up its public relations activities.

"It's a good way to shake us into action," says ICSU executive director Julia Marton-LeFevre about the report. "We need to be more streamlined and to move more rapidly." Although the delegates, who normally meet every 3 years, took no official action last week, they agreed to consult with their members and hold an "extraordinary" session in March 1998 in Vienna to ratify the structural changes.

A Tale of Two Chairs

Science doesn't get much more partisan than it did last week, when the current and former House Science Committee chairs—Representatives Robert Walker (R-PA) and George Brown (D-CA)—both held news conferences to put the best face on their efforts during the now-completed 104th Congress. "The oversight agenda we laid out in the beginning of the Congress has virtually been accomplished," Walker told reporters on 24 September. Brown offered a different view the next day: "We didn't really accomplish a whole hell of a lot in the past couple of years."

Walker, who is retiring, maintains that his Republican-dominated panel succeeded in refocusing the science agenda on basic research and made tough fiscal choices. He notes that it passed authorization bills for all the agencies it oversees. Walker also says the House's approval of a single spending bill this year for virtually all civilian R&D (except medical research) gave a big boost to science's political profile. He was disappointed, however, that the Senate failed to act on most of the House measures—with one recent exception. Last week, the Senate approved a measure backed by Walker calling for more hydrogen research.

Walker's longtime colleague and recent adversary, Brown, hopes to win back the chair in the next session. And Brown isn't shy about criticizing the panel's performance, saying it was fortunate Congress didn't enact much of Walker's R&D vision, given the cuts he proposed in applied research. "I regret his leadership took him in the wrong direction," Brown said. He then offered his own funding plan for science that would increase civilian R&D above both Republican and Democratic plans, assuming level defense spending.

Will he miss Walker? Brown responds with a smile, "Like a toothache." Walker says he now plans to do some teaching.

Arctic Radioactive Dumps Targeted for Study

The U.S., Russian, and Norwegian defense programs are banding together to address the massive radioactive waste problem created by the Russian military in the Arctic Ocean. Last week, defense ministers from the three countries agreed to form a new joint environmental technologies effort and pledged \$2 million to get it off the ground.

The Arctic Military Environmental Cooperation (AMEC) program aims to avert worsening of an environmental disaster revealed after the Soviet Union's collapse 5 years ago. Western governments learned that the Russians had dumped tons of radioactive waste from submarines and icebreakers on and around the Kola Peninsula east of northern Norway in the Arctic. AMEC will offer advice and help develop technologies to prevent release of radionuclides as Russia dismantles old nuclear subs

and deals with other waste at military bases.

Defense Department (DOD) officials say the commitment, although modest, is significant, especially because U.S. visitors may get to see some sites for the first time. "We expect greater opportunity and cooperation through these military-to-military contacts," says DOD's Michael McNerney. "It's a beginning," agrees Bruce Molnia of the U.S. Geological Survey's international programs. Molnia also notes that AMEC will help fill a gap created this year when Congress discontinued a \$10 million Navy program to study Arctic pollution.

The \$2 million will fund six pilot projects over 3 years, from developing a storage container for used nuclear fuel to assessing Russia's radioactive waste stream and jointly testing cleanup methods. Details will be worked out at two meetings this fall.