NIH's increase. But some programs fared a lot better than expected. Take the controversial ATP program. Earlier this year, the House cut ATP's budget from $221 million in 1996 to $111 million next year, and the Senate chopped it to $60 million. But the program emerged from a House-Senate conference with a 1997 budget of $225 million. And lawmakers didn't stop there: They also lifted restrictions the House sought to impose on funding large companies.

ATP's supporters credit a combined push by the White House and industry for the remarkable turnaround in ATP's fortunes. Kathleen Kingscott, an IBM official and chair of the Coalition for Technology Partnerships, called the result "a great victory" that showed that Clinton "went to bat" for the program. "We're very gratified industry has been strongly behind this," says Henry Kelly, assistant director for technology at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.

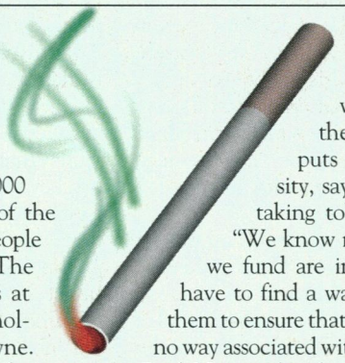
The news is not so rosy for NIST's effort to upgrade its aging facilities, however. Congress denied the agency's $105 million construction request and took away an additional $16 million that remained unspent from last year. While there will be enough money to complete the $184 million Advanced Chemical Sciences Laboratory in Gaithersburg, Maryland, the budget cut will put an indefinite hold on plans to build an Advanced Technology Laboratory and spruce up older facilities. "It's a very bad development," says one NIST official.

NOAA did not grow, but it didn't suffer great losses either, receiving a $1.92 billion budget, slightly less than the 1996 level. Despite Republican criticism of NOAA's climate research programs, the House-Senate conferees added $2 million to the 1996 budget for interannual and seasonal climate change studies and $1 million to the $27 million long-term climate and air quality research. Given that House Republicans took power in 1995 with ambitious plans to scale back this research, eliminate ATP, and do away with the Commerce Department altogether, the 104th Congress that began with a bang appears to be ending with a whimper.

–Eliot Marshall and Andrew Lawler

U.K. SCIENCE FUNDING

Tobacco Funding Debate Smolders



Britain's medical research establishment has been embroiled in a row that's been smoldering since early summer over the propriety of accepting research funds from the tobacco industry. And there is no sign that the smoke is clearing. Last week, two major funding organizations, the Medical Research Council (MRC) and the Cancer Research Campaign (CRC), were expected to announce policies on tobacco funding. Instead, they issued separate statements saying that they need more time to study the issues.

The row broke out earlier this year when senior staff members at Cambridge University voted by a 2-to-1 margin to accept a $2.5 million donation from the world's second-largest tobacco company, British American Tobacco (BAT) Industries. The funds will support a new professorship in international relations to be named after the former company chair, Sir Patrick Sheehy. The decision outraged many of Britain's medical researchers. Walter Bodmer, former director-general of the Imperial Cancer Research Fund (ICRF), described Cambridge's decision to accept the funds as "quite appalling." Oxford University's Richard Peto, an expert on smoking and diseases, says: "British American Tobacco ... has to spend a lot of money buying good will. I'm sorry that Cambridge did not have the sense to turn down the tobacco-industry money."

But the CRC, a medical charity that spends $70 million each year on research—including $3.8 million at the University of Cambridge—took the hardest line: It threatened to halt future funding for Cambridge scientists. Gordon McVie, the campaign's director-general, said he was "bitterly disappointed" that the university had decided to accept BAT's money and promised that a decision on CRC's relations with the university would be announced after a council meeting last week.

The government-funded MRC, meanwhile, was drawn into the row over tobacco funding when media reports earlier this year revealed that it had accepted $220,000 from BAT last year for a study of the potential benefits of nicotine in people at risk of Alzheimer's disease. The money was given to researchers at the MRC's Neurochemical Pathology Unit in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Nicholas Winterton, the MRC's administrative secretary, defended the council's decision to take the money, saying the cash had been accepted under a clear framework that outside funding must not influence the science.

The decision sparked criticism not only from outside but also inside the organization. Mary Rice, head of public relations, told reporters that she had warned that the decision would seriously damage the MRC's reputation as an impartial source of scientific knowledge, but her views were overruled. The MRC fanned the flames when it suspended Rice for her comments—a move described as "outrageous" by the tobacco-control pressure group, Action on Smoking and Health. Like the CRC, the MRC also promised that it would review its policies on such funding at a council meeting last week.

Both councils said, however, that they need to do more homework. "We know what our supporters think, and we sense growing public hostility to the tobacco companies, but we need a thorough study," says McVie. Jane Lee, head of corporate affairs at the MRC, said that many views had been raised at last week's private meeting, but no new policy emerged. She said the council will be looking again at the issues, and until then, "current policy stands." Rice remains suspended, and the research at Newcastle is also continuing with tobacco-industry funds.

The CRC's next step will be to develop a new code to ensure that its grants and intellectual scientific property are not "tainted with tobacco money," as the campaign's statement puts it. Cambridge University, says McVie, isn't alone in taking tobacco-industry funding. "We know many of the institutions we fund are involved," he says. "We have to find a way of dealing with all of them to ensure that the CRC is seen to be in no way associated with the tobacco industry." Paul Nurse, the director general of ICRF, which employs its own scientists and doctors and does not provide any grants for research at Cambridge, welcomed CRC efforts to distance its grants and research from tobacco money. "We sympathize with hard-pressed universities who are desperate for funds," Nurse said, "but we urge any institution to resist the siren voices of the tobacco industry."

The CRC also intends to commission a major new study to assess public knowledge of and attitudes toward the tobacco industry. It hopes the results will help provide support for taking a tough stand on academic institutions that enter deals with controversial partners. "Without public support we would raise no funds," McVie says. And he insists that Cambridge is not yet off the hook: "It and many other universities may face difficulties, but we will be developing the code in consultation with them." David Williams, vice chancellor of Cambridge University, warmly welcomed the CRC's statement. He is confident the university "would wish to cooperate with the proposed courses of action," he said.

McVie hopes the CRC's code will carry clout across all the British medical research charities, which currently spend more than three times as much as the MRC does on research, and even with the MRC itself. "I want to move quickly but would like to make sure we get it right," he says.

–Nigel Williams