A Postelection Vote for Consensus

Democrats and Republicans call for a truce in the bruising ideological fights of the last 2 years. That respite could help rescue science from the wholesale cuts needed to balance the federal budget

If the incoming 105th Congress takes a more bipartisan approach to R&D issues next year, give some of the credit to the chef at the Monocle, a popular Capitol Hill restaurant. Representatives James Sensenbrenner (R–WI), the heir apparent to the chair of the House Science Committee, and George Brown (D–CA), the panel's ranking minority member, spent a pleasant evening there earlier this fall discussing how to end the partisan bickering that has dogged the committee's work for the past 2 years. The meal may have set the stage for a more united front for science and technology.

Their search for common ground reflects a new trend following last week's elections that gave President Clinton a second term and granted Republicans continued control of Congress. With each party capable of foiling the other's proposals, politicians are scrambling to show that they can avoid legislative gridlock by shedding some of their ideological armor. White House officials, lawmakers, their staffs, and science lobbyists say that such a rapprochement could be crucial to prevent science and technology programs from being savaged by the overall federal budget cuts both parties now support to erase the deficit. But both sides will have to overcome a legacy of distrust from the ideological battles of the last Congress.

Brown, who won another squeaker—this one by less than 1000 votes—to return for his 17th term, is optimistic: "The House will be loaded with moderates who will want to cooperate and achieve some kind of change," he says. "The name of the game will be to seek areas of cooperation, and I don't see why R&D shouldn't be one of those areas." The retirement of committee chair Robert Walker (R–PA), with whom Brown clashed repeatedly in the past 2 years, will help lower the temperature on the committee. While the vacationing Sensenbrenner could not be reached for comment, Representative Steve Schiff (R–NM), who will remain as chair of the science panel's basic research subcommittee, seconds Brown's wish: "I hope that we can be as nonpartisan as possible. I don't think that science needs to be a partisan issue."

Such words hearten those in the science community who witnessed bitter fights in the previous Congress over applied technology efforts, global-warming research, and environmental regulations. "If the talk of the last couple of days about bipartisanship is sustained by both sides, then it will greatly help science," says Jack Crowley, who directs the Washington office of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Much will hinge on who holds the reins of power in the committees, federal agencies, and the White House. The two parties will caucus next week to distribute committee assignments, while reshuffling in the Administration is already under way. Meanwhile, the White House is wrapping up work on a 1998 budget request to be submitted in February, and presidential science adviser Jack Gibbons is arranging a series of meetings with congressional leaders to discuss R&D spending.

Turning talk of cooperation into something concrete will not be easy. Republicans say they will continue criticizing the Commerce Department's Advanced Technology Program for being too favorable to big business and NASA's Mission to Planet Earth for being too costly. And not long after his dinner with Sensenbrenner, Brown blasted Republicans for making a mockery of the scientific process by allowing a parade of skeptical researchers to dominate environmental hearings. A moderate tack in the House also seems likely to collide with a more conservative Senate.

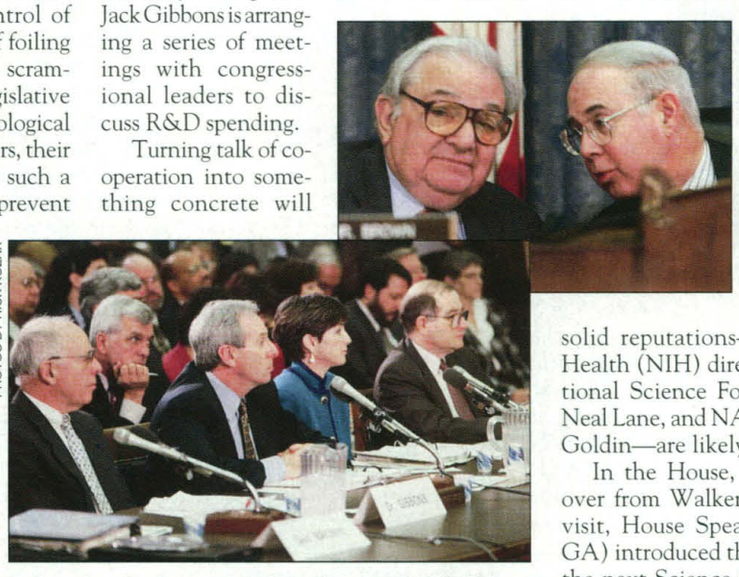
The first experiment in R&D bipartisanship could come at the space summit planned for January between White House and congressional leaders. "It will test our ability to forge a bipartisan commitment to science and technology spending," says Rick Borchelt, press secretary at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.

It is not clear yet who will be around in the Administration to help forge those bipartisan policies. Gibbons, a charter member of the Administration, says he hopes to remain the president's top science official for the time being. He told *Science* recently that a second term would be "a very exciting time," adding that he has renewed the lease on his Washington apartment. Many of his staff, however, have left or are planning to do so in the coming months.

Across the R&D agencies, the biggest change will be the departure of Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary, who has gained notoriety for her extensive travel and has made powerful enemies on Capitol Hill as well as within the White House. But three senior science managers with solid reputations—National Institutes of Health (NIH) director Harold Varmus, National Science Foundation (NSF) director Neal Lane, and NASA Administrator Daniel Goldin—are likely to stay.

In the House, Sensenbrenner will take over from Walker. During a fall campaign visit, House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R–GA) introduced the Wisconsin lawmaker as the next Science Committee chair—quieting rumors that the Republican caucus would abolish the panel in a quest to streamline the House. "He shares the same overall goals as Walker, but he won't shove those down [the Democrats'] throats," says one Republican staffer. Adds Brown: "He's eager to have a collegial relationship, laments the lack of civility, and wants to change that."

He is also on good terms with Representative Jerry Lewis (R–CA), who heads the appropriations panel that funds NASA, NSF, and the Environmental Protection Agency. Lewis told *Science* that he and Sensenbrenner hope to capitalize on Gingrich's support of basic research. He adds that they "need to do a lot of educating" of both new and old colleagues, and he pledges to work cooperatively



PHOTOS BY RICK KOZAK

Calmer heads. Agency heads testifying at a 1995 Science Committee hearing hope to escape partisan wrangling that plagued panel under Walker (*inset*, with Brown).

California Bans Affirmative Action

Programs to boost the number of women and minority scientists have been part of the science education landscape for years, but in the wake of election results from California, educators nationwide are soberly pondering the future of their efforts. Last week, California voters passed an anti–affirmative action initiative, Proposition 209, that outlaws race or gender preferences in state employment, education, and contracting.

The law kills state-funded minority graduate fellowships, forces rapid changes in undergraduate admissions at the University of California (UC), and raises questions about the continued success of model programs that bring young minorities and women into science. It is seen by many as a bellwether of what may come in other states, or even at the federal level. "This will lead to more efforts to get [similar laws] on the ballot, or to get cases taken before the courts," says Shirley McBay, president of the Quality Education for Minorities Network in Washington, D.C.

Some groups have filed lawsuits challenging 209, but state universities must prepare to comply immediately. That means "significant declines" in the number of minority students at the most competitive UC campuses, warns Tom Lifka, assistant vice chancellor at UC Los Angeles (UCLA). And although the law doesn't specifically target science, shrinking the already small minority pipeline will reduce the numbers of those who choose science and engineering, says physicist Stan Prussin, director of the minority-targeted Professional Development Program at UC Berkeley. "It has been a very hard fight" to increase ethnic diversity in science programs, he says, "and I have great fear of what they are going to look like in the next year."

The chilly climate for affirmative action began in California even before the elections, when the UC regents last year ordered the removal of race and gender from admissions and hiring criteria (*Science*, 9 February, p. 752). The rules on undergraduate admissions were to be postponed until 1998—but Proposition 209 forces them to take effect immediately, erasing any hope for a reversal of the regents' decision. The greatest impact will be at top UC campuses that accept only a small fraction of applicants and have relied on affirmative action to boost the numbers of minority students. At UCLA and Berkeley, the percentage of black, Hispanic, and American Indian students in future freshman classes is expected to be halved (see table of estimates).

Also likely to suffer are minority outreach programs that target primary- and secondary-school students, such as the statewide Mathematics, Engineering, and Science Achievement (MESA) program, which has been lauded nationwide as one of a handful of programs that really work (*Science*, 13 November 1992, p. 1190). MESA focuses on minority students who are already "doing OK" in school, says program director Mike Aldaco, and offers extra preparation to help them succeed in the competitive UC atmosphere. Aldaco can't say yet just how Proposition 209 will change MESA. "I'm hoping that we will not end up with a policy that looks solely at socioeconomic status as the measure of disadvantage," he says. If so, many of MESA's best prospects—minority children from blue-collar working families—will be missed.

Indeed, says UCLA's Lifka, 209 will force programs to include students regardless of race—and as a result they will reach fewer minorities. "To capture every one of the [minority] students we were serving previously, you are probably talking about a 10-fold increase in budget," he says. "And you're not going to get that."

Meanwhile, minority graduate students will lose special state-funded fellowships; UCLA alone will have to stop awarding $4 million to $5 million in such fellowships, says Lifka. Federal fellowships that mandate minority preference will be exempt from 209, but may be up for change themselves. Recent court decisions have restricted affirmative action, and last year the National Science Foundation compiled a list of 24 programs—with a total annual budget of roughly $100 million—that target by race or gender and so may be at risk. But officials note that a 1980 law orders NSF to try to boost diversity in the scientific work force, which may protect those programs from legal challenge.

For now, no one can fully predict whether the rest of the country will follow California's lead. But science educators nationwide will be watching anxiously as Proposition 209 takes effect.

–Marcia Barinaga

CHANGING FACES ON CAMPUS

Ethnic Group	Percentage of UC Berkeley Entering Class Pre-209	Post-209	Estimated % increase (% decline)
Black	6.5%	2.5%–3.5%	(46%–61%)
Hispanic	15.6%	6.0%–8.4%	(46%–61%)
American Indian	1.8%	0.6%–0.8%	(55%–66%)
White	29.9%	32.8%–34.2%	9.6%–14%
Asian American	37.2%	44.5%–46.4%	19%–25%

SOURCE: UC BERKELEY

with the Science Committee.

Meanwhile, Representative Joe Knollenberg (R–MI), whose R&D track record is thin, is in the running to lead the appropriations panel that oversees Department of Energy (DOE) funding after the retirement of Representative John Myers (R–IN). In the Senate, John McCain (R–AZ) likely will take over as chair of the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee following the defeat of Senator Larry Pressler (R–SD). McCain has opposed some technology funding and has been a critic of the Energy and Commerce departments. Senator Pete Domenici (R–NM), however, remains in a strong position to defend DOE and the two DOE labs in his state as chair of the Budget Committee and of the energy spending panel. Senator Dan Coats (R–IN), another relative unknown in science circles, hopes to chair the Labor and Human Resources Committee, which oversees NIH, after the retirement of Senator Nancy Kassebaum (R–KS).

The first challenge to R&D supporters will be to ensure that the House and Senate Budget Committees divide up the spending pie without sacrificing large chunks of science and technology spending. And Brown, despite his antipathy toward Walker, says that Walker's absence from the House budget panel will create a power vacuum that could allow panel members from both parties to wield their fiscal axes on science and technology. That, in turn, could set the tone for appropriators.

Ultimately, the bipartisan desire to end the federal deficit may prove an overwhelming force. "We shouldn't have any illusions—the push for a balanced budget will have an effect on R&D," says Erich Bloch, a former NSF director and now a distinguished fellow at the Council on Competitiveness. And a little streamlining might do more good than harm, he adds. But R&D advocates are hoping that the example of Sensenbrenner and Brown's quiet dinner—for which the future chair graciously paid—is a sign that legislators will have the appetite to fight together for continued support of science.

–Andrew Lawler

With additional reporting by Jeffrey Mervis.