

Big Bucks for New Equipment

OTTAWA—The Canadian government is launching a \$1.5 billion program to upgrade equipment and labs at the nation's research universities. The effort, part of the government's 1997 budget announced last week, comes amid continuing cuts in funding for the country's research granting councils, which provide the bulk of support to university researchers. The infrastructure program is expected to help Canadian scientists remain competitive with their global colleagues. It is also seen as a sign of renewed federal support for science after a 3-year austerity binge triggered by a soaring budget deficit, as well as a nod to an important constituency before the anticipated June election.

"The infrastructure program deserves our unqualified support," says University of Western Ontario President Paul Davenport, one of several administrators "elated" by the news. Amid the euphoria, however, university officials are sobered by a third year of cuts, averaging 15% over 3 years, in the budgets of the three granting councils. The councils must also absorb an extra \$7 million contribution to the Networks of Centres-of-Excellence program, a joint university-industry effort that is becoming a permanent feature of the research scene (*Science*, 14 February, p. 922). "All of us will have to continue to work hard to get the budgets of the three granting councils strengthened," says Davenport. Industry Minister John Manley agrees, calling raising those allocations "the next step" in the budget process.

The 5-year infrastructure program will be run by an independent organization, the Canada Foundation for Innovation. The government will contribute \$600 million, instantly making it Canada's largest foundation, and universities must put up at least a matching share of the federal funds for any project the foundation approves. It is the first time the government has made a significant amount of money available for new research equipment and facilities at campuses across the country.

Academic officials are already drawing up their wish lists. University of Toronto President Rob Prichard dreams of facilities that aren't "museum pieces" for Nobel laureate John Polanyi and the rest of the chemistry department, along with improvements to dozens of other departments. Then, there are the print collections and electronic databases for the library. "We could easily use up at least \$115 million," he says.

Prichard is not alone in imagining what the new foundation could mean for his institution. University of Montreal Rector René Simard has his eye on a Level-3 containment facility to conduct research on deadly viruses and bacteria. University of Lethbridge (Alberta) Presi-

dent Howard Tennant is riffling catalogs for the price of an 800-megahertz nuclear magnetic resonance device for the neuropsychology center. "[Canada] has been losing many of [its] top people to other institutions in other countries," says University of Regina (Saskatchewan) President Donald Wells, "not so much because of salary levels, but because we don't have modern facilities. This program will go a long way to reverse that."

Some officials are worried, however, that the foundation's requirement of matching funds will favor the nation's so-called "big 10" universities because of their larger endowments and stronger corporate ties. "It's going to be more and more difficult for the smaller places to stay in the game," says Arthur May, president of Memorial University in Newfoundland. "That's not a good thing. [It's important] to have a thousand-flowers-bloom approach."

Science Minister Jon Gerrard, who championed the program, believes that smaller universities can hold their own, citing the decision by Acadia University in Nova Scotia to be the first in Canada to give computers to all its students. And he expects them to raise a

stink if they are being shortchanged. But John Evans, the chair of the new foundation, says it may be necessary for smaller institutions to join forces to be successful. "Some small institutions actually may not be able to mount the kind of programs on their own," says Evans, former president of the University of Toronto and current chair of Allelix Biopharmaceuticals Inc. "But in combination, they can put together a superb program."

The new effort may also lay to rest an ongoing dispute between the federal and provincial governments over responsibility for academic research infrastructure. The dispute has left universities scrambling to recoup overhead costs that neither government entity feels it should pay. Although many observers see the foundation as a tacit admission of federal responsibility, Manley insists that the scheme sets "no more binding precedent" than earlier federal programs to improve roads or sewers within municipalities. In the meantime, science administrators are content to compete for what Medical Research Council President Henry Friesen calls "a breathtaking" new expression of federal support for science.

—Wayne Kondro

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ARCHAEOLOGY

Monte Verde: Blessed But Not Confirmed

It was the ultimate field trip. A dozen prominent archaeologists flew to Chile in January to see a crucial site in a long-standing dispute over when humans first reached South America. And when the expedition announced earlier this month that the Monte Verde site was indeed 12,500 years old—and so the oldest accepted human site in the Americas—*The New York Times* compared it to "aviation's breaking of the sound barrier." Thanks to this trip, the paper concluded, the field had "finally come to a consensus" and had abandoned the leading

model for the peopling of the New World. That model proposes that the first Americans were the Clovis people, big-game hunters who came over the Bering land bridge and then swept rapidly through the Americas about 11,500 before the present. One member of the expedition told *The Washington Post*: "It totally changes how we think of the prehistory of America." Or does it?

In a discipline as contentious as this, one field trip is unlikely to unite the warring factions. A few skeptics remain unconvinced: "Total consensus will only come when the final report is out and the pattern repeats itself at other sites," says archaeologist Tom Lynch, director of the Brazos Valley Museum in Bryan, Texas, who doubts that humans were at Monte Verde so long ago. And even though opinion has been gradually moving away from the Clovis-first model for years (*Science*, 19 April 1996, pp. 346 and 373), many bristle at the implication that the discipline can be regulated by one or two key people. The Monte Verde trip, they point out, came down to the conversion of just two leading researchers—hardly a



Peer review. A dozen archaeologists approved Monte Verde as pre-Clovis—but the debate isn't over yet.

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