SCIENCESCOPE

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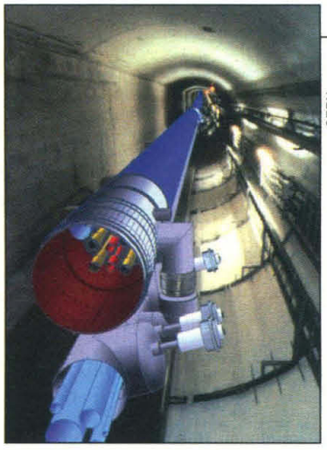

CERN

Remember the SSC! Texan takes a shot at European project, above.

Texan Vows to Fight LHC Funding

Memories of the failed Superconducting Super Collider (SSC) die hard, particularly in Texas. Representative Joe Barton (R), who represents the area that was to be the SSC's home, vowed last week to oppose the $450 million contribution that the Department of Energy (DOE) wants to make to another high-energy physics research project, the Large Hadron Collider at CERN in Switzerland.

Barton, a member of the House Science Committee but not its energy subcommittee, may not have much control over DOE funding. But his statement will play well with constituents, and it concerns DOE officials.

The Europeans "didn't help us, and they went out of their way to stop the SSC," Barton complained in a 6 March hearing of the subcommittee. "I'll be beep-beep-beeped if we'll send a dollar to Europe." Barton said that while he does not oppose U.S. scientists working at CERN, he does take issue with the DOE-CERN agreement, which requires the United States to help build portions of the accelerator and its detectors through 2004. (The National Science Foundation would chip in about $80 million.) Barton wants the United States to have more administrative oversight at CERN, and he wants the Europeans to promise to assist in building future U.S. facilities. "One congressman can raise a lot of sand," he warned DOE energy research chief Martha Krebs, who was testifying before the panel. "I know where the bodies are buried, and I intend to dig them up," said Barton, who left immediately after making his statement.

Krebs did not argue the point, although she commented later that U.S. researchers are getting a good deal in the DOE-CERN agreement. DOE and CERN intend to sign off on a final agreement this summer. But Krebs said Barton's opposition could presage a tough struggle to win the $450 million in funding DOE seeks in 1998.

Brookhaven Lab Chief Retires

Brookhaven National Laboratory director Nicholas Samios is stepping down after 15 years on the job to return to research. His resignation, announced last week, comes amid growing local protests over the discovery in January of a tritium leak from the lab's High-Flux Beam Reactor (HFBR). But Samios says the timing is coincidental, part of a long-planned transition in the lab's top management.

The neutron-scattering facility had been shut down since late last year for refitting, and recent ground-water tests revealed that it is leaking tritium. The suspected source is a 260,000-liter fuel pool at the reactor's lower level. HFBR likely will remain closed for at least a year, says Samios, while its pool is lined with steel. Although the immediate health risks are considered small, the shutdown will affect one of the few radiation sources available to neutron-scattering researchers, who were already pleading for new facilities (*Science*, 9 August 1996, p. 728).

A physicist by training, Samios last year informed the Associated Universities Inc. (AUI), which oversees the lab, that he wished to return to the bench. The board asked him to wait until a new president had been chosen. With the February appointment of Lyle Schwartz to head AUI, Samios will step down on 30 April. A search committee has been named.

House Probes Ex-NIH Researcher

Congress has begun to investigate the controversial research on human embryonic DNA conducted by Mark Hughes, a molecular biologist and former National Institutes of Health (NIH) grantee whose funding was terminated by NIH last October. On 6 March, Rep. Joe Barton (R–TX), chair of the House Commerce subcommittee on oversight and investigations, notified Donna Shalala, secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, that the panel is looking into how Hughes "violated a ban on federal funding of human embryo research," demanding documents by 17 March.

Last week, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that NIH administrators concluded in mid-1996 that Hughes was not disclosing the full extent of his embryo research, leading NIH to end its support. Hughes declined to comment, although he has said that NIH was always aware of the nature of his research (*Science*, 24 January, p. 472).

Legislators Attack NSF Awards

Two legislators are raising objections about a decision on supercomputing grants even before the National Science Foundation (NSF) has made it, raising the political stakes in an already contentious process.

Representatives Mike Doyle (D–PA) and Sherwood Boehlert (R–NY) have questioned the criteria being used by NSF to select the winners of its Partnerships for Advanced Computational Infrastructure program (*Science*, 7 March, p. 1412). Both serve on the House Science Committee, which oversees NSF, and represent centers—the Pittsburgh Supercomputing Center and the Cornell Theory Center—that are expected to lose out when the new sites are announced later this month. Two existing centers, based at the University of Illinois and at the University of California, San Diego, are said to have submitted the strongest proposals.

In a letter to the chair of the panel, the legislators say the process has suffered "from a lack of leadership." That's a reference to recusals by NSF director Neal Lane and other top officials because of links to one or more of the proposals. Last week, Lane declined to comment during a hearing on the NSF budget.

Science Panel Tunes Into Big Picture

A new team of congressional explorers is gearing up to visit some familiar territory—the state of the U.S. research enterprise—and they have invited scientists to come along.

"The Speaker [Rep. Newt Gingrich] and the chairman [of the House science committee, Rep. James Sensenbrenner] have asked me to look into this question, and we hope to move ahead quickly," Representative Vern Ehlers (R–MI) announced last week during a science committee hearing on the 1998 budget request of the National Science Foundation. In a press release, Ehlers says he will "focus on developing a clearly defined, long-term vision of the direction for science research and improvement of our math and science educational systems." Ehlers says he also plans to be "a contact" for scientists to express their views.

A decade ago, in an upbeat funding environment, the Democrat-led committee conducted an exhaustive 3-year investigation that included two dozen hearings. The effort fizzled, however: No final report was ever issued, although three draft chapters were circulated. The new effort is expected to produce a report by the time Congress adjourns in the fall of 1998.