

his easygoing manner, however, have allowed turf fights to break out among his associate directors, hindering progress on education and technology initiatives and making it harder for the science adviser to be heard at the Cabinet table, say Administration sources. They add that this posture has opened the door for others, such as Kathleen McGinty, chair of the Council on Environmental Quality, to expand their in-

fluence through such means as winning personnel slots at the expense of OSTP. "He's intellectually bright and unbelievably nice, but sometimes he needs to be a bit more authoritarian and dictatorial," says one former White House associate.

Gibbons, a courtly Virginian, doesn't apologize for his management style. "If you have to be a bully, that's a sad commentary," he says. In the long run, he says, being polite

and seeking consensus pay off. But in the cutthroat world of the White House, that style may put OSTP at a disadvantage. "He's from a gentlemanly era," says one colleague. "You need a tougher person." The question is whether any successor to Gibbons—even someone with the savvy and access of Deutch—can forge a truly powerful office that puts R&D in the limelight.

—Andrew Lawler

REFORM IN JAPAN

War on Debt Puts Big Science Under Fire

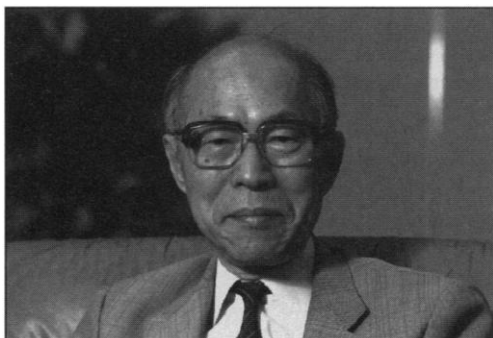
TOKYO—Japanese researchers are keeping a wary eye on governmental reform efforts that could significantly affect scientific activities. Two advisory councils, charged with streamlining the bureaucracy and shrinking a ballooning national debt, are said to be taking a hard look at spending on big science projects, including some high-profile international endeavors, and may even question the need for one of the country's major scientific agencies.

The efforts, which will gather steam over the coming months, stem from promises made during last fall's election campaign by the Liberal Democrat Party (LDP). Shortly after receiving a vote of confidence last October, Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto created two panels to recommend sweeping changes: the Administrative Reform Council, charged with producing a plan by November to streamline the bureaucracy, and the Fiscal Structure Reform Council, which is supposed to report in June on ways to tackle the nation's snowballing debt. The panels—made up of academic, business, and civic leaders and chaired by the prime minister—include just one scientist: physicist Akito Arima, president of the Institute of Physical and Chemical Research (RIKEN). News about their private deliberations is now beginning to trickle out, raising anxiety about how science will fare in the reviews.

Few dispute the need for fiscal reforms. As a percentage of gross domestic product, Japan's \$2 trillion debt—incurred in an effort to revive a sluggish economy—is among the highest of all the industrialized nations. Cutting overall government spending, however, will make it difficult to follow a plan adopted last year to boost R&D spending significantly over the next 5 years (*Science*, 28 June 1996, p. 1868). Indeed, the fiscal reform panel recently told the head of the Science and Technology Agency (STA) that it would not exempt the 17-trillion-yen (\$136 billion) spending plan from its deficit-cutting efforts (*Science*, 25 April, p. 519).

Science has learned that the committee in-

tends to take a hard look at big science projects. The list includes space activities, including the international space station; the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER); and the nation's extensive nuclear-power research program. "Some people [within the fiscal reform council] say that these projects should be suspended," says Minoru Yonekura, an official in the STA's planning department. Although official sup-



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Council compromise. Arima says fiscal reforms may stretch out 5-year spending plan.

port for ITER and the space station remains strong, he predicts that "compared to 5 years ago, it is going to be very difficult to launch new big science projects."

One compromise may be to stretch the 5-year plan over 7 years. Arima says he "may agree with the fiscal reform council" on the need for an extension as long as the goal of increased governmental support for science is maintained. Despite pressure from the committee, Yonekura says STA hopes to keep the current schedule for growth on track: "We will make efforts to maintain the current [5-year] plan."

Keeping the plan intact isn't the only thing Yonekura and his colleagues may have to worry about, however. Their entire agency could fall victim to the far-reaching reforms that LDP officials have promised voters. One popular idea is halving the current number of Cabinet-level ministries and agencies, and the Administrative Reform Council has been asked to produce a plan to achieve that goal. Later this month, that

council will begin to quiz the 21 ministries and agencies on their functions and relations with other agencies.

A prime candidate for pruning is the \$5.8 billion, 41-year-old STA, in large part because of its relative youth, small budget, and widely dispersed constituency. Two ministries that may be asked to absorb it are the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture (Monbusho) and the Ministry of International Trade and Industry.

Not surprisingly, STA officials oppose any change in status. Nobuaki Kawakami, who monitors administrative reform for the agency, says any merger would likely result in "reducing the [government's] promotion of science and technology." Arima believes that it is too early to forecast STA's fate.

In addition to the tasks set for it by the politicians, the administrative reform committee has received pleas for help from various groups. For example, 13 professors at the University of Tokyo Medical School submitted a petition in March to the Administrative Reform Council, to another government reform committee, and to Monbusho, seeking greater autonomy from government-wide rules for the medical school and hospital, particularly on budgetary and personnel affairs.

But the strategy appears to have backfired. The letter was seen by some government officials as a plea to privatize the hospital, and the group antagonized the medical school's faculty council by not consulting it first. Hiroyuki Yoshikawa, who retired last month as president of the university, says that a majority of faculty members at the University of Tokyo and at other national universities share the group's concerns, but that the letter has sown confusion as to what university faculty members think about reform. One professor who signed the letter declined to discuss the matter, saying it had "become a big problem."

Even so, the resulting furor may not amount to anything. Arima says the Administrative Reform Council is likely to concentrate on Cabinet-level ministries and agencies and leave university reform for another time. However, that still gives researchers plenty to worry about.

—Dennis Normile