



Turning up the heat. NIAID is spending more on malaria research.

NIH Steps Up Malaria Research

The U.S. government is planning to "turn up the knob" in its attack on malaria, part of a broad initiative backed by the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) along with European and African scientists. So says Anthony Fauci, chief of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, who last week disclosed that NIAID—the world's largest funder of antimalaria research—is taking several immediate steps. It's creating a shared repository of malaria research materials, boosting its malaria budget \$1.8 million beyond the current \$20 million, and paying to sequence the DNA of two new malaria parasite strains.

Last year, an international consortium began sequencing the deadliest strain, *Plasmodium falciparum*, and now NIAID is adding *P. vivax* and *P. berghei* to the list. NIAID's repository, meanwhile, will offer researchers high-quality, scarce reagents, which Fauci hopes will attract newcomers to the field.

Fauci and NIAID infectious diseases chief John LaMontagne outlined these plans last week at a meeting of the advisory council to NIH director Harold Varmus. The initiative is supported by Varmus, who pledged at a meeting in Dakar, Senegal, last winter to help build a new, Africa-based network of malaria researchers (*Science*, 17 January, p. 299). Varmus spoke again about the project at Columbia University

last month, saying, "It is time to move malaria and other so-called tropical diseases out of the exotic alcoves in which medical schools have traditionally housed them and to put them in the mainstream" of biology.

Varmus and other NIH leaders are planning to meet with European and African health officials in the

Netherlands on 7 July to review 130 research proposals they solicited last winter and develop a plan for shared financing. Says Stephen Hoffman, a U.S. Navy malaria researcher: "This is very exciting from the morale-building point of view; I hope it translates into [long-term] funding."

OMB Chief Upbeat on Research Funding

Many science policy chiefs are grumbling about the funding hits research took in the recent budget agreement between Congress and the White House. But the Administration's top budget official recommends that they complain less and pay more attention to setting priorities.

Franklin Raines, chief of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), pointed out to members of the President's Committee of Advisors on Science and Technology earlier this week that for domestic discretionary spending—the area that includes civilian R&D—the 5-year agreement provides \$1.3 trillion, \$120 billion more than Republicans proposed last year. And it's only \$13.5 billion less than the president's plan released in February, he noted. "That was a major victory," said Raines.

The bad news is that domestic discretionary spending will drop about 14% in real terms through 2002. Given this grim reality, Raines said, the scientific community should focus on promoting the best projects rather than asking for more money for everything.

Raines told *Science* later that science and technology programs, which face gradual declines (*Science*, 30 May, p. 1328), fared better than most areas in the discretionary category, in part because President Clinton and Vice President Gore took a personal interest in R&D. "They don't have to be briefed on this—they know their stuff," he says.

Senate Pledges Action on Science Bills

NASA has gone about its work for years without an authorization bill from Congress, as have the National Science Foundation and the National Institute of Standards and Technology. While the House frequently passes such measures—which set agencies' policy agendas—busy senators have preferred to let appropriations bills do double duty, setting budget and policy. Senate inertia has frustrated House Science Committee members whose policy proposals never become law. However, change may be on the way.

John McCain (R-AZ), chair of the Senate Commerce Committee, which authorizes spending for several science agencies, promised House Science Committee Chair James Sensenbrenner (R-WI) in a private meeting last week that he would work hard to pass authorization bills this year. "It looks like this is going to come to pass," said a jubilant Sensenbrenner afterward. He added that he's hopeful both chambers will agree on legislation; the House already passed its bills.

McCain also shocked Sensenbrenner and Representative George Brown (D-CA), who took part in the meeting as well, by expressing his support for bills that authorize spending for 2 years rather than just one. "For a while, I thought my hearing was off," Sensenbrenner recalls. House members have long argued that 2-year bills provide more stability for agencies, but the Senate has always balked at the idea, for it could mean less congressional oversight. A McCain spokesperson said the senator definitely would back a 2-year NASA authorization and would consider it for other agencies.

Sensenbrenner and Brown planned to meet this week with Senator William Frist (R-TN), who chairs the Commerce subcommittee that oversees the R&D agencies, to extract a similar pledge from him.

Women Science Chiefs Leaving

Women have held an unprecedented number of senior science policy positions in Washington during the past 4 years. But their ranks have been depleted in recent months, and it seems unlikely that the Administration's second term will feature as many women as the first.

The latest to depart is Mary Good, who retired last week as the Commerce Department's technology undersecretary. She follows Anita Jones, who recently left her job as director of research and engineering at the Defense Department. Arati Prabhakar, who headed the National Institute of Standards and Technology, and Christine Ervin, energy efficiency and renewable energy chief at the Department of Energy, resigned earlier this year. Meanwhile, the National Science Foundation's deputy director position remains empty 9 months after the departure of Anne Petersen.

Prabhakar will be replaced by her deputy, Ray Kammer, but the other positions remain open. One White House official says there is no concerted attempt to find women to fill the slots. "I don't think the focus is on women in the sciences," the official adds. "It's looked at across the Administration rather than in one single area." There is one piece of good news, however: Last month, the Senate confirmed Kerri-Ann Jones as head of national security and international affairs at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.