

Congress Considers Breast Cancer Stamp

Advocates of breast cancer research, known as trailblazers for their hugely successful fundraising efforts, are again going where no disease lobby has gone before: They're hoping Congress will authorize sale of the first postage stamp to set aside money for studying a disease.

The idea, first proposed to Representative Vic Fazio (D-CA) by a Sacramento oncologist, is steamrolling through Congress. Last week, the Senate approved an amendment to the Treasury-Postal spending bill, sponsored by Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), that would order the Postal Service to create a special stamp costing a penny more than regular first-class stamps. The extra fee, minus administrative costs, would go toward breast cancer research at the Department of Health and Human Services,

parent of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Feinstein says the stamp could raise \$60 million for breast cancer if it claimed 10% of the market. As *Science* went to press, the House was poised to vote on a similar bill that could set aside up to 8 cents per stamp, and would give 70% of the money directly to the NIH and the other 30% to the Department of Defense.

The Postal Service opposes the proposal, however, saying its mission is delivering mail, not funding research. Observers in the biomedical community are dubious, too. "If you do this for one disease," says a former House appropriations staffer, "clearly there's going to be very significant interest from all the other disease groups, very fast.

That might kill it for everybody. You can't do 200 stamps for each disease." Senate skeptics also note that the idea has



Pennies from the post office? Activists say a stamp like this could raise millions for breast cancer research.

flopped in Canada, where sales of such stamps have been minuscule.

No New Taxes on Grad Stipends

Graduate students are breathing easier now that legislators have axed a clause in a proposed tax bill that threatened their livelihood. Last week, House Democrats lauded an informal deal by a House-Senate panel drafting a compromise tax bill that drops a House provision that would have

eliminated the tax-exempt status of graduate tuition stipends (*Science*, 20 June, p. 1779).

The Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology says that at least 800 of its members blitzed Congress with letters opposing the tax, making the outpouring second only to the response in 1995 opposing planned cuts to the National In-

stitutes of Health's budget. A staffer for the House Ways and Means Committee, where the idea originated, says grad students are "not who this provision was intended for." The bill would, however, still hit the pocketbooks of university employees by removing the tax-free status of tuition waivers for family members.

Poles Apart on Radar Observatory

Political geography held sway over science last week, as an influential Alaskan senator threw up a roadblock to plans by the National Science Foundation (NSF) to build an observatory in Canada's Northwest Territory to study Earth's upper atmosphere. NSF officials are stunned by the proposed change, which would move the Polar Cap Observatory (PCO) to a U.S. site some 2400 kilometers away. And they're scrambling to persuade legislators that the observatory would miss out on the most exciting science if it were not located near the magnetic north pole, where solar winds have their greatest impact.

The key figure in this unfolding drama is Senator Ted Stevens (R-AK), chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee (see p. 470). Last week the panel told NSF that it will get \$25 million for its facility only if it's built at a site in southern Alaska where an ionospheric research lab is being constructed by the Defense Department. That project, called HAARP, is itself controversial (*Science*, 21 February, p. 1060), but the spending panel says that putting the PCO in Alaska "would allow all federal agencies to accomplish polar and ionospheric research without wasteful duplicate investments."

Wrong, says Cornell electrical engineer Michael Kelley, who headed a panel that in 1990 recommended the PCO. "We looked very hard at possible locations, and Alaska was never in the picture," Kelley says. He agrees that the observatory's incoherent scatter radar would be a valuable diagnostic tool for HAARP; but scientific priorities, he says, point to the Canadian site at Resolute Bay, just 200 kilometers from the magnetic north pole.

NSF officials declined to comment on specifics of the proposal, contained in a spending bill before the Senate this week. The House version of the bill doesn't mention moving the site.

Cash-Flow Prospects Worry Academy

The National Academy of Sciences appears to be getting nervous about the impact on the organization's bottom line of a legal battle over how it operates study committees (see p. 473).

Academy officials are worried that government agencies, which fund most of the work of the academy complex's operating arm, the National Research Council (NRC), could begin to shy away from such studies if they think they may wind up in court. Last month the academy fired off a letter to the Department of Energy (DOE) to head off what they feared might be the first sign of that trend. The letter from William Colglazier, NRC executive officer, warned of "serious damage to the academy" if, as rumored, the department's general counsel's office had told DOE managers to suspend formal interactions with the academy until its legal chal-

lenges are settled. Last year DOE spent \$10.6 million on NRC contracts.

But those fears, it now seems, were unfounded. Ralph Goldenberg, DOE assistant general counsel for general law, says the NRC's interpretation is "an overstatement." The new policy merely calls for DOE lawyers to scrutinize any proposed NRC study. And Colglazier admits that the general counsel's instructions were "not as draconian" as he was first led to believe. "At the moment," he says, "we're not that concerned" about financial repercussions.

The NRC may still have cause for concern, however. Lawyers at NASA, the National Science Foundation, and the Department of Health and Human Services say their agencies are also reviewing their relationship with the council, although none has reached a decision on whether changes are necessary.