

## Cloning Ban Waits in the Wings

Although fear that an unscrupulous scientist might clone a human has subsided in Congress, the issue could resurface as legislators return to work next week. And aides say one vehicle with unpredictable consequences for researchers may be an amendment to a 1998 spending bill.

The only panel to act on a proposed ban so far is the House Science Committee, which voted in late July for a permanent prohibition on using federal funds to support "any project of research that includes the use of human somatic cell nuclear transfer technology to produce an embryo." This language, drafted by Representative Vernon Ehlers (R-MI), was criticized as too broad by such groups as the Biotech Industry Organization and the American Society for Reproductive Medicine. Some complain that the bill would ban not just cloning but human embryo research. Others fault the bill for failing to regulate private clinics.

Despite opposition from two members—Constance Morella

(R-MD) and Roscoe Bartlett (R-MD)—the science panel, led by chair James Sensenbrenner (R-WI), voted for the proposal and sent it to the Commerce Committee for further review. But that panel is not expected to take any action this year.

The situation is more fluid in the Senate. Senator Kit Bond (R-MO) has introduced a bill similar to Ehlers's, and an aide on the Senate panel that oversees research notes that this legislation could turn up in another form at any time—including as an amendment to a bill funding the National Institutes of Health.

## DOD Basic Science Takes a Hit

Universities that receive funding from the military are scrambling to reverse a surprise setback in Congress for Department of Defense (DOD) basic research. Following the recommendations of its appropriations committee, the House voted on 29 July to slash Defense Department spending on basic research in 1998 by

more than 4%, to \$1.03 billion. This cut, which would continue a 3-year decline, went against the prevailing mood this year: The president, the Senate, and both congressional authorizing committees have proposed an 8% increase in basic DOD science.

University officials are gearing up to protest. "I hope our industrial colleagues will write to Congress" to oppose the cut, says Venkatesh Narayanamurti, engineering dean at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Leaders of the Association of American Universities also have been discussing a coordinated response. House and Senate conferees must resolve the \$140 million difference in science funds when they meet next month to work out a compromise DOD spending bill.

## Social Policy Debate Could Snag HHS Bill

The National Institutes of Health is looking forward to a healthy budget boost for 1998, but NIH officials better not pop the champagne corks just yet. While Senate appropriators have proposed a 7.5% raise for NIH, and their House counterparts a boost of 6%, the final figure could be influenced by an upcoming House floor debate over social programs in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

When Congress returns from its break next week, it will consider the HHS package (which includes NIH), along with 12 other unfinished money bills for the fiscal year that begins on 1 October. But some Capitol Hill staffers say a fight that delayed a House vote on HHS funding in July may cause trouble again in September. A Republican group that calls itself the Conservative Action Team tried unsuccessfully to cut several programs in this bill before the August recess, and it plans to try again when the HHS bill comes up on 8 September, according to House aides. The group may also throw its support behind an amendment

requiring HHS family planning clinics to give parents notice when minors apply for aid. Representative John Porter (R-IL), chair of the subcommittee that drafted the HHS bill, plans to fight such an amendment.

If the battle produces a stalemate or a bill the White House rejects, the result could be a stop-gap funding bill for HHS with no increase. But one senior House Republican staffer thinks that's unlikely. There will be a noisy "dustup" on the House floor, he predicts, but it won't prevent passage of the HHS budget.

## Chile Ponies Up for Telescopes

Chile has reclaimed its status as a full partner in a U.S.-led consortium to build twin, 8-meter telescopes in Hawaii and Chile. Last week Chilean President Eduardo Frei signed a bill that enables Chile to meet the terms and payment schedule set by the Associated Universities for Research in Astronomy, which manages the \$184 million Gemini project.

Chile had agreed to put up 5% of construction costs, but payments were frozen by a 3-year battle over the project's legal sta-

## Trade Decision Clouds Modelers' Future

U.S. global climate modelers are concerned that they may be headed for the minor leagues of their profession, thanks to a Commerce Department decision last week. Commerce found that a Japanese company illegally charged below cost for a new supercomputer it offered to the U.S. National Center for Atmospheric Research—and the revised price could be beyond NCAR's reach.

A year ago, Commerce began investigating charges by U.S. supercomputer maker Cray Research Inc. that Japan's NEC Corp. tried to sell vector supercomputers below their actual cost when it won a \$35 million contract for a new NCAR computer for predicting greenhouse warming trends. Last week Commerce agreed, finding NEC should have charged 4.5 times more. Next, the International Trade Commission (ITC) will decide whether NEC and another Japanese company found guilty of "dumping" in its NCAR bid should pay duties to bring the supercomputer prices closer to fair value.

But already the decision worries modelers, who say the NEC machine, not Cray's, has the speed they need (*Science*, 16 May, p. 1041). "I don't think there's any possibility NCAR could pay four-and-a-half times the price" to buy the NEC computer, says David Randall of Colorado State University in Fort Collins. Meanwhile, Randall says, "we have colleagues in Australia and England who have immensely more computing power" because they're using Japanese supercomputers. The National Science Foundation, which funds NCAR, is keeping the purchase on hold until the ITC decision next month. Says NCAR director Robert Serafino, "We don't know what we'll do at this point."



GEMINI 8M TELESCOPES PROJECT

**On track.** Gemini telescope goes up in Hawaii.

tus and rules governing all scientific facilities on Chilean soil. The holdup had caused Gemini organizers to begin talks with Australia and to set a 1 September deadline for Chile to resolve the problem (*Science*, 8 August, p. 758). "We're very happy that legislators have recognized the importance of this project," says University of Chile astronomer José Maza.