recommended by Korn will be a decision for the next FDA commissioner, Friedman acknowledges. And no one is likely to accept the job before a new commissioner is named. But Friedman notes that a major job search can take 6 months to a year, and says that starting the process now will avoid "needless delay." As for intramural research, Friedman says, "I personally am not going to see our laboratory infrastructure neglected."

Does that mean he will seek additional funding for research during this year's congressional appropriations hearings? Friedman gives a good-soldier response: "We have a budget agreement with [the Department of Health and Human Services] and the Administration that identifies certain priorities ... and we're committed to participating loyally and actively in that overall framework." In other words, no.

CBER scientists hope to persuade Congress that maintaining their independent research function is worth the money. One of their goals is to get FDA intramural research included in the National Research Investment Act, the legislation introduced last year by Senators Phil Gramm (R–TX), Joseph Lieberman (D–CT), Pete Domenici (R–NM), and Jeff Bingaman (D–NM), calling for a doubling of federal basic research funding over 10 years. The FDA, they say, was the only research funding agency that was left out of the bill.

At the very least, repairing that oversight would help legitimize CBER scientists' bid for more support from the agency and congressional appropriators. It might also get them a little respect.

–Bruce Agnew

Bruce Agnew is a writer and editor in Bethesda, Maryland.

NASA BUDGET

Red Ink Will Not Wash Out Space Science

While most U.S. R&D agencies are savoring the prospect of big budget increases if Congress approves the Clinton Administration's 1999 request, NASA is contemplating a less palatable fate: a smaller budget than it received this year. That possibility brought congressional advocates of the space program rushing to NASA's defense last week. They charged that a declining budget coupled with ballooning space station overruns could cripple science, aeronautics, and technology programs. Says Representative James Sensenbrenner (R–WI), who chairs the House Science Committee, "NASA's budget is a mess."

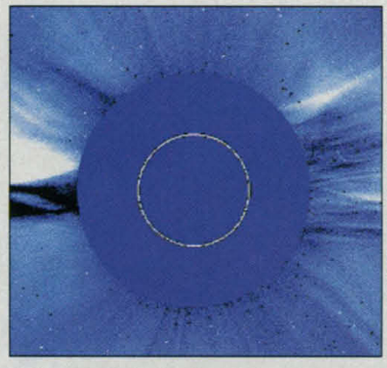
Such heartfelt concern from Capitol Hill might seem a godsend to NASA brass, but agency officials insist it is misplaced. Testifying on 5 February before the Science Committee's space and aeronautics panel, NASA Administrator Dan Goldin staunchly defended the proposed 1.3% decline in the agency's current $13.6 billion budget. Most science would get a boost, he pointed out, and that would hold true even if NASA transfers $100 million from the science budget this year to pay for half of the $200 million in station overruns, as Goldin has proposed. NASA-funded researchers, at least, seem convinced. "Last year I was so disheartened; now I can't tell you how happy I am," says Anneila Sargent, associate director of Owens Valley Radio Observatory in California and chair of the NASA space science advisory panel.

The reason for such optimism is simple: After threatening for months to slash the agency's science accounts, the Administration has proposed instead to infuse them with more money. The budget request released on 2 February would boost life and microgravity research by 13%, to $242 million. And while earth science spending would stay roughly flat at $1.37 billion, officials say it's enough to keep ongoing work on track. Space scientists, in particular, say they are delighted with a requested $2 billion in 1999—nearly a 4% raise—and a proposed 2003 budget of $2.6 billion. The additional funding would help continue the U.S. portion of the international solar terrestrial program—which faced an early shutdown before the solar maximum early in the next century. Researchers are eager to gather data on the maximum—which some fear could devastate certain satellite communication systems—to better understand the sun's cycle. The request also includes funds to study a next-generation space telescope; for the 2002 start of the Gamma-Ray Large Area Space Telescope, which would probe black holes, dark matter, and star formation; and to start a Europa orbiter mission. NASA also wants to spend $41 million on prep work for the Constellation X-ray mission late next decade to examine galaxy evolution.

"It's really remarkable," says Sargent. Just a few months ago, the White House Office of Management and Budget had been considering radical cuts to the space science account that could have wiped out a host of proposed programs, including robotic missions to Mars, Administration sources say. But they say that congressional support for space science combined with the possibility of using money from the government's proposed tobacco settlement—although that funding may never materialize (see p. 974)—ultimately protected the program. According to NASA space science chief Wes Huntress, the program survived "a very dire, dire situation."

The favorable long-term outlook makes Goldin's plan to transfer $50 million in 1998 funds from space science to the station more palatable, Huntress says. The bulk of that money, he says, would come from delaying by a few months the renewal of grants for outside researchers who analyze NASA data. "I don't think individual researchers will feel it," says Sargent. NASA also wants to take $50 million from the earth science program in 1998 for station overruns. Ghassem Asrar, the new earth science chief, told *Science* that this cut would have little impact on NASA's Earth Observing System—launch of the first massive probe is slated for July—or on research, primarily because of the program's slow spending rate.

Despite the good vibes coming from NASA and the scientific community, Sensenbrenner and other lawmakers say they fear further space station raids on science. At last week's hearing, Goldin sought to reassure Congress by pledging that NASA would not ask for similar transfers in 1999—barring a Russian pullout from the coalition. He added that the station's cost overruns, nearly $1 billion now, appear under control. Goldin also promised that $600 million NASA had borrowed from funds set aside to build life and microgravity facilities for the station will be returned in time to get them in orbit. "We'll deliver every single science facility we agreed to," he said.


SOHO/LASCO/NAVAL RESEARCH LABORATORY

Solar windfall. Studies such as coronal imaging fare well in NASA request.

With only themselves carping—and given the importance the White House assigns to the space station—Sensenbrenner and other lawmakers may have a hard time denying Goldin's request to transfer funds to pay for the overruns, say Administration officials. Still, a lean NASA budget is likely to continue to draw catcalls from the Hill. Says Representative Dana Rohrabacher (R–CA), "I hardly think we should be happy the space program is bleeding to death more slowly."

–Andrew Lawler