

pledge not to spend the surplus from Social Security. But a series of floor votes last week suggests that researchers face an uphill battle in the stiff competition for federal funds.

The scientific community has organized an effort to offset the July actions of the appropriations committee, which took a \$1 billion bite out of NASA's overall budget and stripped all but \$8 million from a proposed \$235 million increase for NSF research (*Science*, 6 August, p. 813). On 1 September White House Chief of Staff John Podesta gave a speech extolling the value of research, warning that this and other spending bills are "playing politics with science and technology funding." Last week NSF director Rita Colwell called the budget process "disturbing," saying that it "turns our backs on the country's capability" to do great things in science.

But even as she spoke to a roomful of reporters at NSF headquarters in Arlington, Virginia, House members were voting 212 to 207 to shrink NSF's \$2.7 billion research account by an additional \$10 million, putting the money into a \$225 million program to house indigent people with AIDS. "This is a Sophie's Choice, [putting us between] a rock and a hard place," lamented Representative Sheila Jackson-Lee (D-TX), an advocate for research on the Science Committee who the next day unsuccessfully proposed adding \$924 million to NASA's budget. "I have always supported NSF, but today I am making a choice."

Representative Jerrold Nadler (D-NY), the author of the amendment that put Jackson-Lee and others in a tight spot, explained that the funds were needed to restore an earlier cut in the AIDS program. He said he singled out NSF's \$245 million polar research program to absorb the blow because "there are 12 other agencies that support Antarctic research, so we would not be greatly hindering this research ... while significantly improving the lives of individuals who need our help now." Social science lobbyist Howard Silver, chair of the Coalition for NSF Funding, confessed that his group did not try to defeat the amendment: "It's hard to ask members to vote against homeless AIDS patients."

To keep within the spending caps, members were prohibited from proposing any funding increase without an offsetting cut. That rule left research advocates with little room to maneuver. Representative Vernon Ehlers (R-MI) proposed—and then quickly withdrew—an amendment to boost NSF research by \$230 million by cutting every other discretionary program in the bill by 0.35%. The pattern was repeated twice for portions of NASA's budget in hopes of recovering some of the \$566 million sliced from the agency's

\$3.7 billion space and earth science accounts. The ploy was intended to put pressure on House legislative leaders to fight for these programs when they meet with their Senate counterparts later this fall to negotiate the final version of the bill. Science supporters were leery of putting the amendments to a vote, however, because "it is more difficult to bring something up in conference if you've already lost on the House floor," notes the American Astronomical Society's Kevin Marvel, who called the final House vote "disappointing for the space sciences community."

NASA and NSF supporters remain hopeful that the appropriations process will ultimately go their way, however. They note that Science Committee chair Representative James Sensenbrenner (R-WI) voted against the bill and pledged to fight for a bigger budget for both agencies. The Senate was expected to begin work on its version of the bill this week, with spending panel chair Senator Christopher Bond (R-MO) and ranking member Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) hinting that they may be more generous to the two agencies. How generous, however, will depend on whether the spending caps remain in place.

—JEFFREY MERVIS AND DAVID MALAKOFF

EUROPEAN UNION

Tough Questions Greet New Research Chief

The European Parliament was set to vote this week on the entire slate of new commissioners—the European Union's (EU's) equivalent of a cabinet—put forward by incoming European Commission President Romano Prodi. If, as widely expected, the Parliament approves Prodi's team, Belgian Socialist Philippe Busquin will move into his new Brussels office as the head of the EU's \$4-billion-a-year research program.



Unknown quantity.
Philippe Busquin.

Busquin is something of an unknown quantity, but he outlined his plans earlier this month at a hearing during which he was grilled by conservative members of the European Parliament (MEPs). He said he wants to make greater use of the EU's Joint Research Centre (JRC), review the extent of Europe's participation in the planned International Thermonuclear Ex-

ScienceScope

The Compleat Fly It's a bit early to break out the champagne for scientists sequencing the DNA of the fruit fly, whose 143-million-base genome is the largest ever attempted. But optimistic press notices are already fizzing away. Celera Genomics Inc. of Rockville, Maryland, announced on 9 September that it had "finished the sequencing phase," after producing 1.8 billion units of DNA data.

With the jigsaw pieces strewn randomly on the table, the "challenging process" of assembling the *Drosophila melanogaster* genome into a comprehensive picture has just begun. J. Craig Venter, Celera's president, claims the finished product "will validate the effectiveness" of his company's controversial whole-genome shotgun approach (*Science*, 18 June, p. 1906).

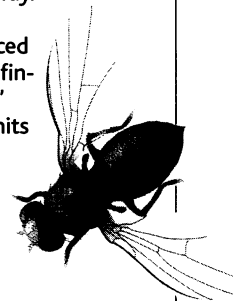
Most gene jockeys won't be able to judge that claim until finished sequence data are released to the public. That process will begin in late October and continue through December. Until then, Celera will share its data only with corporate clients.

Finer-Toothed Comb Security at the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico, already the subject of scathing probes by Congress and the Department of Energy (DOE) in the wake of Chinese spying allegations, is about to be put under the microscope yet again. University of California (UC) President Richard C. Atkinson last week said that his 20-member advisory council will "review the management situation surrounding" the flawed investigation of former Los Alamos physicist—and alleged spy—Wen Ho Lee and report back later this year. The UC manages Los Alamos and two other labs under contract to DOE.

The move accompanied Atkinson's 10 September announcement that he was disciplining two former lab security officials for lapses—but would not punish the lab's former director, metallurgist Sigfried Hecker, as requested by Energy Secretary Bill Richardson last month (*Science*, 20 August, p. 1193).

The sentences—which include pay freezes and an employment ban—were not to Richardson's liking. DOE press secretary Brooke Anderson says, "Secretary Richardson would have preferred that the disciplinary actions be stronger." But, she adds, "it's time to move on."

Contributors: Eliot Marshall, David Malakoff



perimental Reactor (ITER) fusion project, and pursue a proposal to develop a patent that would be valid across the EU.

As the head of the EU's research directorate, Busquin, 58, will administer the 4-year, \$17 billion Fifth Framework research program and plan its successor. Although he has focused on politics for the past 2 decades, he started his career in science. He received a physics degree from the Free University of Brussels in 1962 and was an assistant physics lecturer on the university's medical faculty from 1962 to 1977. In 1976, he studied ecology and environmental issues at the Free University, and from 1978 to 1980 he chaired the board of directors of Belgium's Institute of Radioelements. He later rose to political prominence as the leader of the Socialist Party in Belgium's French-speaking region. Along with his new colleagues, Busquin will be taking office 4 months early, because the former commission resigned en masse last spring in response to allegations of cronyism and mismanagement (*Science*, 19 March, p. 1827).

In written and oral answers to the MEPs' questions, Busquin expressed support for the JRC but made it clear that he wants to make some changes. The JRC was set up as a nuclear research center 40 years ago but has since grown to include institutes covering fields from space applications to consumer protection. Europe's current concern over food safety shows that a body like the JRC is needed, he said, but the JRC "should play a more structured role" in supporting EU policy-making. The JRC's director-general, Herbert Allgeier, told *Science* that he was impressed with Busquin's knowledge and interests: "He has studied physics, he is a good listener, and he has an energetic approach."

As for intellectual property issues, Busquin noted that "the patent system in Europe is cumbersome and complex. The cost of a patent is on average four times higher in Europe than in the U.S., and the current European patent does not automatically guarantee protection in all member states." He said he favors the introduction of a "Community patent" to grant protection across the EU.

Italian MEP Guido Bodrato also quizzed Busquin about the EU's involvement in ITER. The United States pulled out last year, but the EU remains a partner in the project, along with Russia and Japan. A decision on the EU's participation "can only be taken in the context of the next nuclear research program," Busquin said, indicating some qualms about a recent proposal to scale ITER down to a smaller machine. "The laws of physics require the construction of relatively large facilities in order to study con-

ditions in a future fusion reactor." Busquin called for further debate on the future of EU fusion research.

The harshest questioning during his appearance before the Parliament's research committee concerned his qualifications for the post and his ability to administer public funds. Critics asked whether—in the wake of the cronyism and mismanagement allegations that plagued his predecessor, Edith Cresson—Busquin's authority would be compromised by past financial scandals involving Belgium's Socialist Party. Busquin denied any involvement in those scandals and offered to resign if Prodi asked him to do so. In the end, the parliamentary panel neither endorsed nor opposed his nomination.

The chair of the research committee, Spanish Socialist Carlos Westendorp, reported after the hearing that some members "doubted both Mr. Busquin's future capability to perform as research commissioner, and his leadership capacity to restructure and reform" the research directorate. However, Westendorp added that "many others found him to be adequate, conscientious, and familiar with the research world."

—ROBERT KOENIG

BIOTECHNOLOGY

Wellcome Seeks New Home for Business Park

"WANTED: Huge biomedical research charity seeks 40,000 square meters of empty space for biotech business park. Proximity to world-class genome research center would be an advantage. \$160 million available to spend on development. Offers from anywhere in the world will be considered."

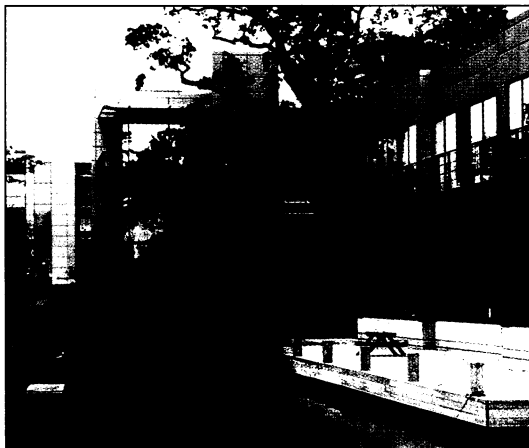
After being refused planning permission by the local council to build facilities in which biotech companies would rub shoulders

with researchers at its Genome Campus, Britain's Wellcome Trust is looking for an alternative venue. And, to the consternation of the U.K. biotech industry, the trust will consider sites overseas, which trust director Mike Dexter says is not an empty threat. That possibility has touched off a furor. John Sime, director of the BioIndustry Association, a trade body representing small and medium-sized bioscience companies, says, "If Wellcome decided to go overseas, it would be a tragedy. Towns like Munich, Rotterdam, and Lyons [all vigorously wooing biotech companies] must be laughing themselves silly."

The site search follows a decision last month by John Prescott, minister for the environment, transport, and the regions, to uphold the decision of the South Cambridgeshire District Council to deny the trust, after a 2-year battle, the permission it needs to develop land next to its Genome Campus at Hinxton near Cambridge. The council argues that the local infrastructure could not support the 1000 new jobs created by the 40,000-square-meter facility, which would house start-up companies and R&D offshoots of larger pharmaceutical firms. It suggested that the trust could use one of several existing science parks elsewhere in Cambridgeshire or, if that were unacceptable, build a smaller, 24,000-square-meter facility that would house only new spin-off companies.

Both suggestions miss the point, says Dexter. The trust wants to tap into the intellectual powerhouse of the Genome Campus, comprising Wellcome's sequencing facility, the Sanger Centre, as well as the European Bioinformatics Institute and the government's Human Genome Mapping Project Resource Centre. "It is important," says Dexter, "to have daily, face-to-face interactions and for spin-off companies to learn from established, successful firms."

The trust also hoped that the site might benefit from the SNP Consortium of major pharmaceutical companies which, with backing from Wellcome, is trying to identify genetic markers (single nucleotide polymorphisms, or SNPs) that will give medical researchers an idea of how effective a medicine will be for each individual. This "not-for-profit" \$45 million effort is taking place at the Sanger Centre and three other major research centers in the United States. For these reasons, a site elsewhere in Cambridge or a smaller site that excluded established firms would not be commercially viable, says Dexter. So last week, the trust decided that if it could not establish a



Ivory silo? The Wellcome Trust's Genome Campus seems destined to remain in splendid, rural isolation.

CREDIT: WELLCOME TRUST