

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.

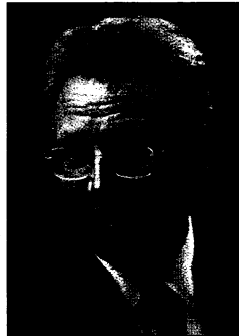
—JEFFREY MERVIS AND DAVID MALAKOFF

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.

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-



Unknown quantity.
Philippe Busquin.

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."

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