

in November, when several outraged members of Congress presented on the House floor a price list for various fetal organs. They alleged that the price list had come from a company called Opening Lines and was evidence that the company was trafficking in fetal tissue. The House passed a resolution condemning such sales and called for a hearing into the matter.

The night before the 9 March hearing, ABC News broadcast a report on 20/20 in which the owner of Opening Lines, Missouri pathologist Miles Jones, told a reporter posing as an investor that he could make \$50,000 in a week from sales of fetal tissue. On 10 March, the FBI launched an investigation into whether Jones or the Kansas City-area clinic where he apparently obtained tissue broke federal law, said Special Agent Jeff Lanza of the FBI office in Kansas City, Missouri.

Jones, who could not be reached for comment, had been subpoenaed to testify at the hearing, but he failed to appear; the committee voted unanimously to hold him in contempt of Congress. Two workers from the clinic that allegedly procured tissue for Jones did appear, but both said they did not have personal knowledge of illegal tissue sales. One of those, Dean Alberty, was the key figure in the videotape that had been making the rounds on the Hill. But under oath, Alberty, who admitted being a paid informant for an antiabortion group while working at the clinic, hedged his earlier allegations. He said that researchers would call him to ask what kinds of tissue were available that day, but he "did not discuss prices" with them.

The committee also called on two scientists who work with fetal tissue: Samuel Cohen of the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha and Hannah Kinney of Harvard Medical School in Boston. Both testified that they had no knowledge of companies that sold fetal tissue for profit. Kinney told the committee that the fetal brain tissue she uses comes either from the pathology department within Harvard Medical School or from the fetal tissue bank at the University of Washington, Seattle, which charges a flat fee of \$100, no matter what tissue a researcher requests.

Despite the lack of evidence, the committee said it will continue its investigations. Spokesperson Steve Schmidt said committee staff are looking into the pricing practices of several organizations that provide fetal tissue to researchers, including the University of Washington. And committee member Tom Coburn (R-OK) says he intends to introduce a bill that would set up a national reporting network on fetal tissue transfers. Both tissue providers and re-

searchers would be required to detail the source of the tissue and what, if any, fees were paid. A spokesperson for Coburn said the form would be "similar to the records a pharmacist has to keep" on sales of controlled substances.

—GRETCHEN VOGEL

GLOBAL CHANGE

Endorsement for Controversial Satellite

The presidential campaign appears to be going into orbit. An Earth-monitoring satellite initially proposed by Vice President Al Gore won scientific endorsement last week from a panel of the National Research Council (NRC). President Bill Clinton's science adviser Neal Lane immediately hailed the study as "a rigorous analytic review" that gives a green light to the program and called for bipartisan support for the effort. But with Gore

as the likely Democratic nominee, that may not materialize: Republican leaders in Congress have long opposed the venture, and Representative James Sensenbrenner (R-WI), who chairs the House Science Committee,



Green light? NRC panel found Al Gore's proposal for an Earth-monitoring satellite scientifically sound.

promptly issued a statement complaining that the satellite "is not the best use of NASA's scarce science funding." Nevertheless, space agency managers told Congress on 8 March that they are pushing ahead for a planned spring 2001 shuttle launch.

Gore first proposed the satellite—named Triana for the member of Columbus's crew who first spotted land—in March 1998. The idea was that the spacecraft would beam back pictures of the whole planet, which would "awaken a new generation" to environmental concerns. NASA embraced the idea, then projected to cost only \$50 million.

But Gore's political nemeses on Capitol Hill, such as Sensenbrenner, complained that the program lacked scientific merit and hadn't been peer reviewed. Some said it would produce little more than an expensive screen saver. NASA tried to answer those criticisms by adding a host of global change instruments to accompany Triana's camera. Those instruments, selected through peer review, would measure Earth's vegetation and cloud coverage, and also the ozone and aerosol levels in its atmosphere.

Those additions pushed the mission's price tag to \$75 million, which only increased the furor over the project. The House voted last summer to cancel it, and a NASA inspector general's report criticized its rising cost (*Science*, 24 September, p. 2041). Although it was rescued at the last minute in a deal with the Senate, Congress ordered NASA to stop work on Triana for 90 days while the NRC studied the scientific merits of the venture. The committee, chaired by University of Michigan president emeritus James Duderstadt, provided a clear, though qualified, green light for the spacecraft.

The panel concludes that Triana's instruments and its unique position—at a distance of 1.6 million kilometers it would be farther out than other Earth-observing satellites—could provide a fresh set of global data on everything from ozone to forest fires. That data will "complement and enhance" those from other spacecraft closer to Earth, and "may well open up the use of deep-space observation points ... for Earth science," the study states. Duderstadt's panel also determined that the program's cost "is not out of line for a relatively small mission." But the NRC panel also urges NASA to conduct more extensive testing of the satellite's components before launch, and it suggests that "there may be insufficient funding for scientific analysis of the data." Sources familiar with the program add that funding woes could be increased by the 90-day stand-down ordered by Congress, which will add as much as \$10 million to \$15 million to Triana's costs.

Despite these caveats, researchers involved in the effort are delighted with the report. "We can move ahead now," says Francisco Valero, an atmospheric scientist with San Diego's Scripps Institution of Oceanography and the mission's principal investigator. He insists that Triana will be more than a politician's daydream, capable of providing new data that will help resolve the critical issue of whether human activities are contributing to global climate change. But with the presidential election campaign getting off the ground, Triana is unlikely to shake off its political stigma.

—ANDREW LAWLER