

nique gains adherents, it will undoubtedly become more accessible to a larger number of labs. "There will be an explosion in cryo-ET in the next 10 years or so," predicts microscopist Timothy Baker of Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana. "It will be a major player in cell biology, no doubt about it."

—ERICA GOLDMAN

U.S. BUDGET

Smithsonian Science: Vote of Confidence

A year ago, the Smithsonian Institution, home to 16 museums and six research centers, was in danger of losing one-third of its 2003 research funds in a bruising encounter with the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The Administration had decided that the National Science Foundation (NSF) should manage \$35 million of the Smithsonian's portfolio. But scientists objected, the transfer to NSF was shelved, and last week two national panels concluded that the whole idea was a big mistake.

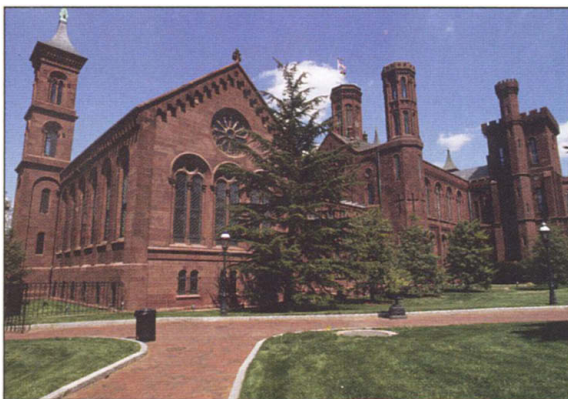
A quasi-federal agency established in 1846, the Smithsonian relies on the federal government for 57% of its annual expenses, including funds for research centers that carry out studies ranging from plant systematics to astrophysics. OMB last year wanted to shift funds for three of those centers to NSF: the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics (CfA), the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center, and the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI). The budget agency argued that scientists at these centers should compete for grants like nongovernment researchers do and that NSF would do a better job of peer review.

When this proposal was leaked in December 2001, Congress, the Smithsonian, and independent scientists objected loudly. OMB backed down (*Science*, 7 December 2001, p. 2066). In return, the Smithsonian agreed to ask the National Research Council (NRC) and the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) to look into how its appropriation might best be spent.

Both panels released reports last week saying, in effect, "Don't fix what isn't broken." They endorsed the status quo because they "were just so impressed by" the Smithsonian's scientific research, says NRC panel member Anthony Janetos of the H. John Heinz III Center for Science, Economics and the Environment in Washington, D.C. He says research is "one of the real gems" of the institution. Like other panel members,

Janetos thinks cutting the direct federal support would be devastating. The NRC report concluded that "it would probably lead to the demise of much of the Smithsonian's scientific research program."

Rather than give Smithsonian scientists an unfair competitive advantage, the NRC and NAPA panels argue, federal appropriations keep them on par with their academic colleagues. Three-quarters of the funding pays for salaries, and most of the rest pays for maintenance, administration, and other routine costs. Researchers still need to get some outside funding to do their work. The fact that Smithsonian researchers compete successfully for outside grants—they won 325 in 2001—indicates the excellence of the science they do, the reports conclude. "The staff is doing very well competing on the outside," says Cornelius Pings, former president of the Association of American Universities and head of the NRC committee. And that should allay OMB's fears about the quality of the work, he adds. However, NRC



Research relief. Two panels advised that Smithsonian science budgets should remain intact.

did call for more extensive, periodic reviews of research by outside experts.

The panels also uncovered some problems. "The numbers associated with scientific research at the Smithsonian were a little confusing," says J. William Gadsby, NAPA director of management studies. "We had difficulty sorting things out." For example, figures provided by Smithsonian leaders often didn't match those provided by the science centers themselves. David Evans, the Smithsonian undersecretary for science, agrees it is a problem and hopes that a newly installed accounting system will remedy it.

The reports "are ringing endorsements" of Smithsonian scientists, says CfA's director, Irwin Shapiro. Adds STRI's director, Ira Rubinoff: "Hopefully this will allow us to go on and do our work." Even so, they and their colleagues must wait to see whether the White House follows these recommendations in its 2004 budget.

—ELIZABETH PENNISI

With reporting by Andrew Lawler.

ScienceScope

Heavy Objections Some public health advocates want the Bush Administration to remove a controversial researcher from a lead-poisoning advisory panel. But the Administration isn't budging.

More than 60 groups last week asked Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Tommy Thompson to remove William Banner of St. Francis Hospital in Tulsa, Oklahoma, from the panel, which advises the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on how to prevent childhood lead poisoning. They note that Banner has testified on behalf of lead paint producers in legal proceedings, arguing that blood lead levels up to seven times the current federal standard don't harm children (*Science*, 25 October, p. 732). That record makes Banner's appointment "an egregious slap in the face to sound science informing the CDC," says Eileen Quinn, deputy director of the Alliance to End Childhood Lead Poisoning.

The appointment of pediatric hematologist Sergio Piomelli of Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center in New York City, who believes that the current federal blood lead standard is too strict, has also ruffled feathers. Piomelli told *Science* that a lead industry representative called to say, "We would like to nominate you," and I said, 'Sure.'" But he stresses that he fought the lead industry for years to remove lead from gasoline.

HHS spokesperson Bill Pierce says both appointees are "highly qualified." Critics promise to keep a close eye on future appointments to the 20-member panel.

Unhappy Wait French scientists will have to wait at least another year to see if the conservative government will fulfill a campaign promise to increase the nation's research budget. Despite a petition signed by more than 5000 researchers—including Nobel laureates Georges Charpak and François Jacob—the National Assembly voted 5 November to decrease the 2003 budget by 1.3% over current levels. The same day, research minister Claudie Haigneré announced that she plans to ask for a 4% boost in 2004.

Chemist Henri-Edouard Audier of the École Polytechnique near Paris, who launched the petition campaign, is not impressed. "Madame Haigneré only made this announcement after we sent the petition to the press," he says, adding that French scientists intend to "keep up the pressure for the entire next year."

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