

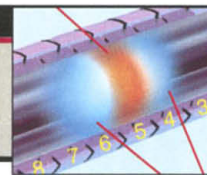
Faster, cheaper, better way to the planets



Political boxing match



The race to antimatter



released immediately, and any group who wants to analyze and write them up should do so—with appropriate credit,” she explains.

But the letter signed by Preuss and leaders of the International Nucleotide Sequence Databases is only fueling the flames. Although Birney agrees with its broad outlines, he would prefer a more flexible approach. Data producers, data users, and database managers “have to all get into a room and figure out the best structure” to ensure access but give credit to sequencers, so that they “don’t just become unseen supporting cast.” The U.K. biomedical charity Wellcome Trust hopes to do just that at a meeting it is organizing this January.

—LESLIE ROBERTS

U.S. SCIENCE POLICY

GOP Takes Senate, Budget Uncertain

U.S. science advocates face a new political landscape in Congress. When voters handed Republicans control of the Senate last week, ending a brief era of divided government,

The upheaval could temporarily disrupt the flow of grants to researchers if congressional leaders decide to put off final action on spending bills that fund NIH, the National Science Foundation (NSF), and other science agencies until the new Congress convenes. Those bills, which would provide double-digit increases for NIH and NSF, cover the fiscal year that began 1 October, but none have yet been passed and the agencies are running on a temporary spending measure. If lawmakers, back in town this week for a special postelection session, decide to extend the temporary spending measure until the end of January, NIH and other agencies will be forced to delay awards for a slew of new grants—including bioterrorism research—planned for early next year.

In the long term, lobbyists don’t expect the Republican takeover to reverse growing bipartisan support for government spending on science. Key spending panels, for instance, are expected to be led by Republicans with a pro-research slant, including familiar faces such as Senators Arlen Specter (R-PA) and Kit Bond (R-MO).

Republican control does worry some biomedical research groups that are opposed to a ban on research involving human cloning, however. The White House and the House of Representatives have backed legislation that would ban not just reproductive cloning but the use of cloning techniques to create embryos for re-

The Bush Administration has also discussed making permanent an existing tax break for corporate spending on R&D.

The new Congress will be missing some veteran science advocates, chief among them Representative Connie Morella (R-MD), whose district includes NIH and the National Institute of Standards and Technology. She lost a close race to lawyer Chris van Hollen. But the House’s “physics caucus” remains intact: Representatives Vernon Ehlers (R-MI) and Rush Holt (D-NJ), the body’s two academically trained physicists, won reelection easily.

—DAVID MALAKOFF

SMALLPOX

Leaks Produce a Torrent of Denials

France? That’s how many researchers and policy-makers reacted when they read a page one *Washington Post* story on 5 November that listed France, along with Russia, North Korea, and Iraq, as countries that U.S. intelligence sources believe hold clandestine stocks of smallpox virus. French officials had an even stronger reaction: A statement issued by France’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs categorically denied the assertion “in the strongest terms.”

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared in 1980 that its vaccination program had eradicated smallpox from the human population, and WHO member states agreed to destroy all but two stocks of the virus: one held at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia, and the other at VEKTOR in Koltsovo, Russia. Experts have suspected, however, that samples of the virus might be in the hands of ill-

THE 2003 SPENDING LOGJAM

Appropriations bill	Last step cleared	
	By House	By Senate
Labor-HHS (NIH)	No action	Floor approval
VA-HUD (NSF, EPA)	Committee approval	Committee approval
Energy	Committee approval	Committee approval
Interior	Floor approval	Committee approval
Commerce (NIST)	No action	Committee approval
Agriculture	Committee approval	Committee approval
Defense	Signed by president	

they put President George W. Bush in a stronger position to advance policies—from a ban on human cloning to a permanent tax break for corporate research spending—with implications for scientists. The shift could also delay pending budget increases for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and other science agencies.

For the past 18 months, Democrats have held a single-vote majority in the 100-member Senate, giving them control of all committees and the legislative agenda. But the election will give Republicans at least 51 seats when Congress reconvenes in January. Republicans also strengthened their small majority in the House of Representatives.

Republican leaders might also speed up action on other bills of interest to researchers. One creates a new Department of Homeland Security, which would back terrorism-related R&D. Another is a massive energy bill that authorizes extensive new research programs.

4 Nations Thought To Possess Smallpox

Iraq, N. Korea Named, Two Officials Say

By BARTON GELMAN
Washington Post Staff Writer

WASHINGTON—300 is a common estimate, and some are higher—than any terrorist attack save that of Sept. 11, 2001. It has been left to President Bush to resolve a deadlock among his advisers: View President Cheney is said by participants in the debate to be pressing for rapid, universal inoculation, while Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy G. Thompson prefers a voluntary program that would wait at least two years for an improved vaccine.

In public, the White House has described its smallpox concerns in only hypothetical terms, and until now the gravity of its assessment has not been known. Bush administration officials did not share their evidence with a panel of outside scientists established to advise them on smallpox. Some officials said the reticence results from unwillingness to compromise intelligence sources. Others cited fear of provoking

These assessments, though unrelated, have helped drive the U.S. government to the brink of a mass vaccination campaign that would be among the costliest steps, financially and politically, in a year-long effort to safeguard the U.S. homeland. Public health authorities in and out of government project that the vaccine itself, widely administered, could kill more Amer-

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