

Briefings

edited by COLIN NORMAN

Congress to Help Rebuild Mouse Lab

Congress has included \$15 million in an appropriations bill for the Department of Health and Human Services to rebuild the Jackson Laboratory in Bar Harbor, Maine.

The facility suffered a devastating fire and the loss of millions of specially bred mice last May, and lab officials have estimated that it will cost \$25 million to rebuild.

Congress decided to help out after a panel, established by NIH and headed by Texas attorney Robert E. Mitchell, affirmed last month that the lab is a "unique national resource" and recommended it be rebuilt within 2 years. However, the panel said the government should not be expected to cover all the costs; the lab should also seek money from other public and private sources.

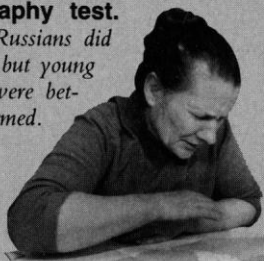
Layoffs Begin at Research Labs

Some government laboratories have begun issuing pink slips to technical staff because of Gramm-Rudman-Hollings budget cutbacks. The across-the-board reductions kicked in automatically last month when Congress and the Administration failed to agree on how to bring the federal deficit below \$110 billion in fiscal year 1990, which began on 1 October.

Hardest hit to date may have been the Department of Energy's magnetic confinement fusion research program. The Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory, managed by Princeton University, has dismissed 42 engineers and technicians. General Atomics, a San Diego-based company that operates the DIII-D tokamak for DOE, has let 35 workers go. Some fusion workers at Oak Ridge National Laboratory also may

Geography test.

Older Russians did poorly, but young adults were better informed.



Roman Poderni © National Geographic Society

The Gallup poll, conducted last spring for the U.S. National Geographic Society, sampled only the Russian Republic and involved interviews of 1500 people in Moscow and the industrial city of Kursk. Compared with people in nine other nations who took the same test in 1988, the Russians shared bottom ranking with the Mexicans. The Swedish outperformed everyone else, followed by the West Germans and the Japanese. The Americans ranked sixth.

Soviet officials quickly came up with an explanation for the dismal showing of their countrymen: Russians over 55, they said, grew up during the war years and therefore received limited education. Young adults, they noted, fared considerably better, achieving fourth place and leaving Americans at the bottom.

Nonetheless, Soviet officials were shocked at the results, according to the National Geographic Society. Vladimir G. Andreyenkov of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, which participated in the survey, said, "I didn't believe Soviet citizens knew so little about geography. . . . The results were unbelievable. They will have very great repercussions in the Soviet Union."

lose their jobs if the budget crisis is not resolved soon.

High-energy physics laboratories are also scrambling to figure out how to cope with less. At Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, officials are trying to figure out whether they can avoid laying off people by sharply cutting back running time for experiments.

Some of this pain can still be removed, say congressional aides, who believe there's still a good chance that Congress and President Bush will agree on a way to hold the federal deficit to \$110 billion without cutting funds that Congress has already appropriated.

ACS Weighs in on Science Education

Representative Doug Walgren (D-PA), chairman of the House science research and technology subcommittee, might have been a chemist rather than a politician if he hadn't

Misplacing Kabul

Thousands of their youngsters died there but 62% of Russians don't know where Afghanistan is. Soviet citizens, it seems, are about as ignorant as Americans when it comes to knowledge of geography.

This was the conclusion of the first such survey ever to be completed in the U.S.S.R.

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had such a discouraging introduction to chemistry in the 10th grade. "I missed out when the atomic table was not presented to me in a way that I could understand."

The sorry state of science education for today's young Doug Walgrens—and particularly their female, black, and Hispanic counterparts—was aired once again recently, this time at a Capitol Hill briefing staged by the American Chemical Society.

The ACS was publicizing its new report, "Education Policies for National Survival," which contains ideas for improving chemistry education from elementary school through college and beyond. Among the recommendations:

- All aspiring elementary school teachers should take at least three semesters of laboratory-based science.

- Chemistry should be taught at every pre-high school grade, as well as kindergarten, including "safe, hands-on sci-

ence activities."

- The NSF budget for university chemistry research should be doubled by 1993 and the annual budget of the Science and Engineering Education directorate should be hiked to \$600 million.

- Advanced study by females and minorities should be encouraged through facilitated child care, forgivable education loans, and flexible deadlines for obtaining a degree.

Nabisco Chips in \$30 Million

Many hope the recent announcement by RJR Nabisco Inc. will prove a sign of increased corporate involvement in public education. The company is creating a \$30-million fund to promote reforms in elementary and secondary schools. The money will be distributed as annual grants of up to \$250,000 over 3 years to about 60 schools around the country.

The program, called "Next Century Schools," is designed to encourage "risk taking," according to the company's CEO Louis V. Gerstner. Innovative plans are sought from applicants nationwide in all areas of administration, academics, and educational technology. The criteria for awarding grants will include the promise of improved student performance; commitment to reform on the part of parents, teachers, and the community; and plans for sustaining changes in the long term.

North Carolina, where several of the company's subsidiaries are located (RJR stands for R. J. Reynolds), will be the initial beneficiary of Nabisco largesse. The first 15 grants are to be awarded next spring. Selections will be made by a 17-member board chaired by Gerstner and peopled by various governors and education officials, including American Federation of Teachers president Albert Shanker.

Some cynics see the RJR Nabisco program as part of a strat-

egy by tobacco companies to bolster their worsening image. But one thing is certain: the only comparable corporate program is said to be one launched last summer by General Electric to the tune of \$20 million offered over 10 years.

Megaprojects Under Review at OSTP

D. Allan Bromley, President Bush's science adviser, said last week that his office is about to launch a review of the cost and timing of the megaprojects begun by the Reagan Administration. They include the Superconducting Super Collider, the Space Station, the Human Genome Project, and the National Aerospace Plane.

"It is quite clear that all of them cannot be continued in parallel . . . because we simply do not have the funds," Bromley told a meeting of the Washington, D.C., Science Writers' Association in his first megacounter with the press since taking on his new job. "We are going to have some phasing, if in fact we are going to continue

with them all," continued Bromley, "so we are going to have to engage in a very difficult process of priority-setting of trying to get the maximum research that we can from the money the Congress can make available to us. I don't know yet how that's going to come out. It is a process that is just getting under way."

Asked whether he would seek to shift funds from defense to civilian R&D, now that Cold War tensions have lessened, Bromley replied: "The answer is 'Yes.'" Bromley noted that under the Reagan Administration, the Pentagon's share of the total federal R&D budget ballooned from one-half to two-thirds. What he would like to see—and he had apparently just delivered this message to Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney—is a major shift in the ratio of Pentagon spending on research versus weapons development and testing. Currently, he said, only about 8% goes to R&D as it is usually defined.

Finally, Bromley promised to be more accessible to the press in the future. Because of the

pressure of work, he said he's been hard to reach. All the reporters except one (*Science*, 13 October, p. 203) seemed to agree.

Max Planck Picks a Lawyer as Leader

A professor of law has been elected head of Germany's Max Planck Society, the largest research organization in Germany outside the universities. Hans F. Zacher, specialist in international welfare law, is the first nonscientist to preside over the society in its 41-year history. Its annual budget of DM1.74 billion (about \$945 million) is distributed among 67 institutes, most of them dedicated to science. How will they fare under a welfare lawyer? "The election of a researcher who is not a scientist is extraordinary," said the society's spokesman Michael Globig, but scientists need not fear for their finances. Zacher sees one of his tasks as an effort to cure the schizophrenia of German society, which has high hopes—and equally acute fears—of science.

And Who's Behind That Mask?

The Chinese government was apparently expecting more trick than treat when the U.S. embassy in Beijing threw a Halloween bash last month. A crowd of Chinese army soldiers scrutinized the costumed, masked guests as they made their way to and from the evening party at the embassy. Soldiers wielded AK-47s and other weapons and surrounded the compound's long wall, according to press accounts and other sources.

What does this have to do with science? The Chinese were worried that astrophysicist Fang Lizhi and his physicist wife Lu Shuxian, who took refuge in the U.S. embassy in June, might escape incognito.

Fang and Lu apparently didn't attend the party. But the People's Army couldn't have known that. What if the couple had chosen to appear as Thomas Paine and the Statue of Liberty? And then to disappear through the gates and into the night?

Bonfire to Save the Rhino

Remember Kenya's \$3-million ivory roast, when that country torched 12 tonnes of ivory to draw attention to the plight of the elephant? Well, they are at it again, this time on behalf of the rhino. Speaking in Washington last week Richard Leakey, the noted anthropologist who is Kenya's director of Wildlife Conservation and Management, promised to burn 300 kilograms of rhino horn "within the next few weeks." At \$10,000 per kilogram, that's another \$3 million conflagration from an endangered species.

Poachers have destroyed 95% of the world's black rhinos since 1970. "We would like to embarrass the world into doing something constructive about this slaughter," Leakey said. He was speaking at a press briefing to announce a \$2-million grant to elephant conservation from the Agency for International Development. While grateful for the cash, which will be available to all countries with African elephants, Leakey chided Senators Bob Kasten (R-WI) and Patrick Leahy (D-VT) because Congress came up with only \$2 million. "Kenya, a poor country, has already made a \$3-million contribution to the PR effort, and we plan to give another \$3 million," he boasted.



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Rhino DNA Mix and Match

After a 2-year study, Columbia University biologists have discovered that one black rhino is—genetically speaking—pretty much like another. That is important because it means that animals from different parts of Africa could be gathered together for breeding purposes, were that needed as a last ditch effort to save the species.

Don Melnick, associate professor of biological anthropology at Columbia, delved into the DNA of rhinos from three distinct

regions: Kenya, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. He discovered that despite being separated now by hundreds of miles, animals from the three populations are as similar as if they were still all living and breeding in one big group.

So conservationists, in their efforts to save the few remaining black rhinos, can potentially gather scattered animals together into havens and encourage the beasts to breed. Pooling dispersed rhinos into sanctuaries would make them easier to protect from poachers and give males and females a better chance of meeting during the 2-day estrous period. If the rhinos had been genetically more distinct, interbreeding might have been ruled out.