

DOE Reconsiders Lab User Fees...

■ The Department of Energy appears ready to drop a controversial proposal to charge all researchers "user fees" for access to special facilities at the national laboratories. A draft DOE report obtained by *Science* concludes that such fees would raise little money and might "destroy the many advantages resulting from the collaboration between industry, academia, and government researchers."

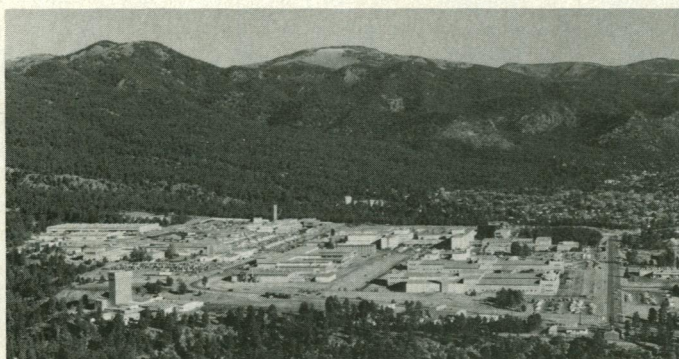
The report, which is expected to be sent to Congress shortly, notes that companies might be discouraged from making some investments in facilities such as Brookhaven's National Synchrotron Light Source if they have to pay for fundamental research at the labs. (They already have to pay their way for proprietary work.) The report points out, for example, that companies have bought experimental hard-

ware for their own research at the labs and later donated it to DOE for public use.

DOE undertook this study at the request of Congress, which last year asked the department to find ways to "reasonably increase revenues." The congressional request surfaced first in the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1990, and DOE seemed ready to sign on to the

idea of user fees when it published its National Energy Strategy in February (*Science*, 1 March, p. 1016).

It was the disappointing bottom line, as much as anything else, that seems to have prompted DOE to change its mind. As it says in its report, "There is little potential to increase net revenues to the federal government."



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...Weighs Changes in Lab Management

■ The University of California is getting a bit edgy about its contracts for managing the Lawrence Berkeley, Lawrence Livermore, and Los Alamos National Laboratories. UC runs all three for DOE at a cost of roughly \$2.3 billion a year. The contracts won't expire until September 1992, but negotiations should start soon, and there could be problems.

The main one is that UC could have some competitors for the first time. DOE's chief, Admiral James Watkins, is considering putting the contracts up for bids rather than just extending them as in the past. He expects to get advice on this option soon from Richard Claytor, the head of

DOE's weapons programs, and Stephen Wakefield, DOE's general counsel.

Then there are growing tensions between the university and DOE. In particular, the new crew brought in by Admiral Watkins is regarded at the labs as brash and tough, and not necessarily fond of the traditional way of doing things. Witness the tiger teams' search for violations of regulatory code (*Science*, 19 April, p. 366). Even more galling from the university's point of view is DOE's recent heavy-handed management of public relations. During the Persian Gulf war, DOE ordered all its labs and contractors to avoid discussing with the media "war-

related research and issues"—including environmental research on Kuwait's oil fires. The order has since been amended but not lifted. Now a new memo, dated 28 March, has gone out to lab officials. It points out that DOE policy prohibits lab personnel from speaking with national media unless they first obtain permission from the department. But this power to limit scientific communication is precisely the kind of thing the university has resisted over the years, and in the past it has been specifically omitted from DOE-UC contracts. DOE's new emphasis on security could make future contract negotiations—if they occur—more difficult.

■ The Howard Hughes Medical Institute is turning its attention to the truly young end of the scientific human resources pipeline. On 1 May the institute plans to announce a \$6-million program for funding educational programs at science museums aimed at students from kindergarten to 8th grade.

The idea is to involve teachers, community leaders, and parents in activities that will turn kids on to science at an early age. The \$6 million is in addition to the \$38 million the institute is currently spending on graduate and undergraduate science education. The first awards will be made in the spring of 1992.

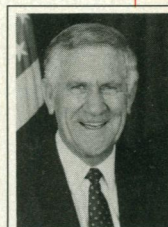
Stymied Sex Survey

■ After stalling for 2 years, the Bush Administration has quietly requested \$3 million in the 1992 budget for the National Institutes of Health to begin work on a survey of the sexual behavior of Americans. But don't expect pollsters to start asking their questions anytime soon. Neither Congress nor the Administration is enthusiastic about the idea, and the plan is likely to get caught in a political Catch-22.

Epidemiologists have been saying for years that a large, up-to-date behavioral survey is crucial for designing intervention strategies to cope with the AIDS epidemic, and earlier this year the Institute of Medicine urged that such a survey be undertaken.

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development first solicited proposals for such a study in 1987, but its plans quickly drew conservative fire. For example, Representative William E. Dannemeyer (R-CA) said the survey would be more appropriate in the pages of a pornographic magazine than in a federally sponsored research project. The Administration was not enamored of the idea either, so it promptly adopted the bureaucratic tactic of promising to give the survey a thorough review before going any further. Two years later, the Department of Health and Human Services says that review isn't finished.

By requesting funds to begin the survey, the Administration can argue that it is heeding the urgings of the medical establishment in the fight against AIDS. But on the other hand, it knows that the House Appropriations Committee is unlikely to approve funds for a proposal that's still under review. In this way, both branches of government can keep stalling for a long time.



Dannemeyer