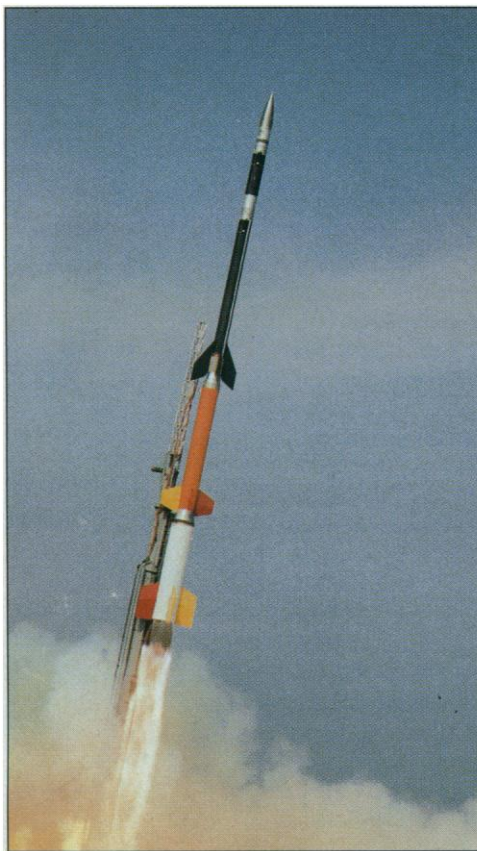


NASA's Sounding Rocket Program Under Commercialization Pressure

■ Worried managers at NASA's research facility at Wallops Island, Virginia, are looking for ways to preserve their sounding rocket program—which focuses on upper atmosphere studies—while turning over launch operations to private companies, as Congress is demanding.

The impetus for change comes from Representative Robert Walker (R-PA), ranking minority member of the House Science Committee, who in July introduced the Omnibus Space Commercialization Act of 1991. In addition to offering tax credits and other incentives, the bill calls on NASA to speed the transfer of its technology to the private sector. Although House staffers give the bill a "slim to none" chance of passing this year, NASA shifted its commercialization plans into



A noncommercial NASA sounding rocket.

high gear after Walker and Representative Ralph Hall (D-TX) "badgered" NASA deputy associate administrator Michael Lyons as to when NASA would commercialize the \$36-million sounding rocket program during a hearing in July, says one NASA official.

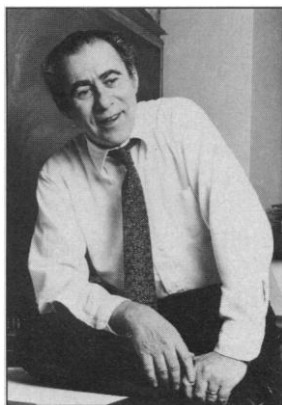
Since Walker's bill might increase the cost and lower the frequency of launches—in part because NASA would have to scrap most of its existing stockpile of 1000 small rockets and purchase launch services from firms in the private sector—space agency officials are anxious to see commercialization proceed more gradually. Says one official, "We'll propose at least some form of commercialization to get [Walker and Hall] off our back."

HUGO To Get a New Director—And a Mission?

■ Microbiologist Norton Zinder of Rockefeller University will likely be the next director of the Human Genome Organization (HUGO), the international outfit created several years ago to coordinate genome research worldwide. Zinder would replace James Wyngaarden, the former NIH director who took on the HUGO job just a year ago. Wyngaarden, who is also foreign secretary of the National Academy of Sciences, resigned in August, claiming insufficient time to devote to fund-raising for the perpetually cash-strapped organization. The HUGO council has now defined

the directorship as a full-time job.

Zinder, who until last June chaired the council that advises NIH on its genome project, says he is leaning toward taking the job—if he can figure out what, exactly, it entails. The job will probably involve some combination of fund-raising and developing a long-range strategy for HUGO, which has yet to find its mission. At any rate, Zinder will keep his appointment at Rockefeller University, where he has been for 40 years. Says Zinder: "Do you think I would be foolish enough to give up a tenured position for something that nebulous?"



Norton Zinder

More OSI Delays

■ A final report in the NIH misconduct investigation of Tufts immunologist Thereza Imanishi-Kari, which seemed near completion last spring, will now be delayed until the U.S. attorney in Baltimore decides whether or not to indict Imanishi-Kari on fraud charges.

Last March, a leaked draft report from NIH's Office of Scientific Integrity (OSI) accused Imanishi-Kari of fabricating data in a 1985 *Cell* paper she co-authored with Nobel laureate David Baltimore. She denied those charges but said she couldn't defend herself without examining the forensic evidence on which they were based. That evidence, however, had been impounded by the attorney's criminal investigators.

OSI originally planned to delay the final report indefinitely until NIH Director Bernadine Healy stepped in last June. Ac-

Europe's Bio-Patent Dispute

■ Efforts to allow the patenting of life forms in Europe, which will come to a head in the European Parliament over the next few weeks, may not recover from a setback dealt by the Parliament's agriculture committee. This influential group last week rejected a proposal that would extend patentability not only to living organisms, but also to constituent parts such as genes.

Citing the possible "impact on the economic, social, ecological and ethical bases of our society," the agriculture committee sent the proposal back to the European commission—Europe's Brussels-based bureaucracy—for further study. The commission is said to be "furious" at this rebuff, according to Henk Hobbelen, a campaign worker with the lobby group Genetic Resources Action International.

This proposal—part of a biotechnology directive intended to improve the competitiveness of the European biotech industry—is an attempt to remove differences in standards used in industrialized nations. In the United States, for instance, the Supreme Court permitted the patenting of biological processes, and the Patent Office has allowed the patenting of life forms such as Harvard University's "oncomouse." European law forbids such patents.

Although the deck is now stacked against it, the patent provision could still squeak through Parliament. The legal committee, which has jurisdiction in this area, has yet to weigh in with an opinion.

cording to congressional testimony, Healy demanded a 60-day delay, after which she and the office would reconsider the issue. Now OSI has returned the ball to the U.S. attorney. "At some point, he either has to bring charges or drop the case," says one OSI source. In either case, Imanishi-Kari would finally see the evidence.

Meanwhile, Baltimore has issued his own attack on the draft report. In an interview with the *Journal of NIH Research*, he noted that Healy's criticisms of OSI as a badly run office "raise very serious questions" as to whether the report is "an accurate document."