



D. DUROIS FOR ESA

**Up, up, and...away?** Hermes may never fly, say German space officials.

## Hermes Partners Come Up Short on Cash

The European Space Agency's (ESA) manned space program is set for an ignominious crash landing, if delegates to a make-or-break ESA council meeting on 15-16 July can't find anyone to commit an extra \$660 million over the next 7 years for its ambitious Hermes space shuttle project.

Last week, the German parlia-

ment threw ESA's plans for Hermes into disarray when it failed to approve a significant increase in the budget for DARA, the German space agency. Although DARA's 4.5% budget increase is better than many had expected, it still won't be enough to meet a planned 20% contribution to Hermes, agency officials say. As a result, the program is likely to fall more than half a

billion dollars short by the year 2000. Enthusiasts for the project—particularly the French space agency—must now either dig deeper into their own pockets or accept that the project must be further descope.

The current controversy began last November, when Germany announced it would pull out of the program entirely unless ESA cut it back. In response, ESA officials suggested proceeding with a simplified, unmanned version of the shuttle for launch in 2000. Last week's news from the German parliament, however, means that even the unmanned vehicle is too expensive.

DARA officials are now talking of building nothing more than a smaller test vehicle to study problems associated with reentry. This idea isn't likely to please the French, but if the shortfall left by Germany's financial problems can't be made up within the 13 ESA states, the European program may be permanently grounded.

## Harrison Case Nears Settlement

Six years after the mathematics department at the University of California at Berkeley denied tenure to Jenny Harrison, and nearly 3 years after she countered with a high-profile sex discrimination lawsuit (*Science*, 28 June 1991, p. 1781), Harrison may finally be on the verge of winning her battle. University representatives have entered serious negotiations with Harrison aimed at settling her lawsuit, and both sides say they are "hopeful" about the possibility of soon reaching an agreement.

"We expect an agreement any day," Harrison said in recent congressional testimony. Chris Patti, the university lawyer on the case, confirms that "we're engaging in the process, because we're hopeful something can be worked out." But he adds that it is "premature" to expect a settlement "any day."

If the parties do reach a settlement, they will end a lengthy public dispute that has become a *cause célèbre* in university sex discrimi-

nation cases. The cost has been particularly high to Harrison, who remains unemployed and who says she has spent \$120,000 in legal fees on the case.

While both parties are bound by court order not to discuss any details of the negotiations, Harrison

says that her minimum requirement includes gaining tenure. She also is asking the university to help her form a Mathematics Resource Center on campus in order "to support and encourage the women students and faculty instead of building unfair barricades."

## DOE Considers Declassifying Inertial Fusion

Two years after Energy Secretary James Watkins publicly pledged to eliminate "unnecessary" security restrictions on inertial confinement fusion, the Department of Energy (DOE) may finally be ready to declassify some of its research in the field.

Because inertial confinement fusion—which uses high-powered lasers to simultaneously heat and compress small pellets of frozen hydrogen—is similar in some respects to the detonation of nuclear warheads, DOE has always run the program in secrecy. Now, however, the agency has prepared new guidelines that will declassify most of the U.S. research on the design of the fuel pellets, according to Stephen Dean, a former DOE official and now president of the nonprofit firm Fusion Power Associates. Making such information available would give a boost to research into civilian uses of inertial fusion.

But DOE is unlikely to go too far: The new guidelines won't allow any disclosure of data from experiments in which scientists imploded fuel pellets with the radiation from underground nuclear weapons tests, Dean says. The agency hasn't officially released its guidelines, although Dean says he believes the agency is feeling pressure to do so before a biennial fusion meeting is held this fall.

## Venter To Leave NIH for Greener Pastures

Craig Venter, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) researcher who kicked off an international furor by attempting to patent thousands of gene fragments, will soon be leaving NIH to accept an offer he couldn't refuse. He plans to head up a new, not-for-profit research institute closely modeled on his own human genome research.

Within a week or so, Venter and his entire senior staff will move to the temporary headquarters of the Institute for Genomic Research in Montgomery County, Maryland. Venter will have virtually complete control over the new institute as president, chief executive officer, and chairman of the board of trustees. Furthermore, the new institute will focus on speeding up the discovery of human genes through rapid sequencing, an approach Venter pioneered at NIH. "How could I say no?" he asks.

Providing the seed money is a new company known as Human Genome Sciences Inc., a subsidiary of the Healthcare Investment Corporation, which bills itself as the largest health care venture capital fund in the world. In exchange for its initial \$70 million, 10-year grant to the institute, the company will own the intellectual property rights to any discoveries. But the research staff will be isolated from commerce, Venter stresses: Neither the institute nor its scientists will receive royalties from the company, and the staff will have complete freedom to publish.

Venter insists that "the goal of the institute is not to try to monopolize or own human genes." While patent policy remains to be worked out in consultation with NIH and the Patent and Trademark Office, Venter told *Science* that his "personal leaning" is not to seek patents on the gene fragments his new institute discovers.



Craig Venter