# SCIENCESCOPE

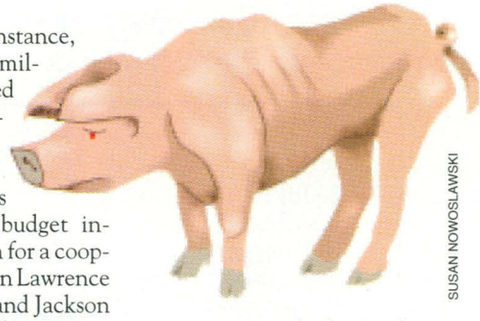
edited by DAVID P. HAMILTON

## Congress Cuts Back Research Pork Barrel

Science funding may not grow as fast as scientists would like this year—in many respects, it may not grow at all. But for supporters of peer review, there is an unexpected silver lining in the budgetary gloom: Congress seems to have cut back on the scientific pork barrel.

For the past several years, legislators with clout have made a point of "earmarking" large sums of money for research projects in their states, particularly for buildings and other facilities at smaller and poorer universities that tend to fare badly in peer-review competition. Last year, this practice endowed such pet projects with just over $500 million.

So far this year, however, Congress has shown remarkable restraint. Last year, for instance, it placed nearly $125 million worth of unwanted projects in the Department of Energy's (DOE) research budget. But this year's House-passed DOE budget includes only $4 million for a cooperative project between Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory and Jackson State University. The Senate upped that amount by a mere $400,000—money intended as "planning funds" for five science facilities in Hawaii, Oregon, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania.



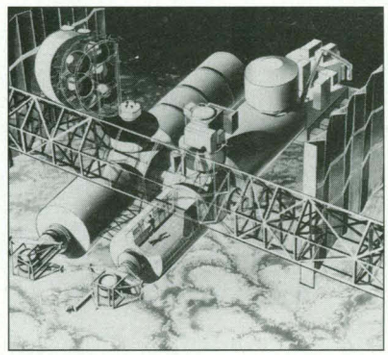
SUSAN NOWOSLAWSKI

But this restraint is not universal. While the NASA bill last year contained some $17 million in pork, this year the House passed a version that allocated a total of $83.5 million for an earth sciences consortium in the home district of appropriations subcommittee chairman Robert Traxler (D–MI), $1.8 million for a "classroom of the future" at Wheeling Jesuit College, and $8 million for the Delta College Learning Center. The Senate Appropriations Committee let those earmarks stand and added $700,000 of its own—$500,000 to the Georgia Research Alliance and $200,000 to the MIDnet center in Lincoln, Nebraska.

## Leaving NASA Gasping for Breath

On the "you shouldn't take a congressman too literally" front:

During last week's House of Representatives floor debate over the space station, West Virginia Democrat Alan Mollohan argued that NASA couldn't back out of the space station program because it has already signed contracts with Canada, Japan, and the European Space Agency to develop the $40 billion project. Then, in a tone of remarkable gravity, he noted: "It strikes me that many of our colleagues voice their opposition to the space station as if NASA operates in a vacuum. It does not." Despite Mollohan's admonition, the House voted 237 to 181 to continue funding the space station, life-support systems and all.



## Coppola Looking for an AIDS "Cure"

As the world's virologists and immunologists were scratching their heads at the bewildering news coming out of last month's AIDS conference in Amsterdam, an unfamiliar delegate was stalking the scientific sessions: Academy Award–winning filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola. Why? The father of the *Godfather* movies says he has a new film project in mind—one about the cure for AIDS.

Given the enormous public attention focused on the disease, the film's working title—"Cure"—is probably enough to set off alarm bells in the scientific community. Coppola, however, insists that his work will be fiction, not documentary. Even so, he says he hopes the film's release, some 3 to 4 years away, will coincide with the real cure. Hollywood has never been short on dreams.

Accompanied by screenwriter Diane Johnson (who cowrote *The Shining* with Stanley Kubrick), Coppola attended scientific sessions and press conferences and then, after hours, dined with leading AIDS researchers and activists. Casting calls are a long way off, but observers speculated wildly about who might play whom, with only one obvious choice surfacing: Elizabeth Taylor as...AIDS philanthropist Elizabeth Taylor.

## UPCOMING REPORTS

**From the Office of Technology Assessment:**

**Cystic Fibrosis and DNA Tests: Implications of Carrier Screening**
*Late summer*

Analyzes the legal, ethical, and economic implications of genetic screening for the cystic fibrosis (CF) gene. Also considers CF carrier screening as a model for handling DNA tests for other conditions.

**A New Technological Era for American Agriculture**
*Late summer*

Assesses major issues facing agricultural technology--mainly biotechnology--over the next decade, and analyzes environmental quality, food safety, food quality, economic and research issues, and policy implications.

**The Biology of Mental Disorders**
*Late summer*

Appraises the role of biology in several mental disorders, including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, major depression, obsessive compulsive disorder, and panic disorder.

**From the National Academy of Sciences:**

**Measuring Lead in Critical Populations** (National Research Council)
*August/September*

Identifies and evaluates methods for measuring environmental lead exposure in certain populations, such as pregnant women and children under 2 years of age. Recommends options for research strategies to refine these techniques.

**Microbial Threats to Health** (Institute of Medicine)
*October/November*

The result of an 18-month study of significant emerging infectious diseases and actions that might be taken against them.

**Pesticides and Children** (National Research Council)
*December*

Examines science and science policy issues related to the regulation of pesticide residues in the diets of children and infants. Reviews current methods for determining acceptable levels of exposure, and recommends ways to improve the current risk assessment process.