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Tokamak Alternative Gets a Vote of Support

Despite the collapse of a Department of Energy (DOE) promise to increase the U.S. fusion budget by 5% a year (see page 208), a draft report by a fusion advisory panel will suggest restarting an Oak Ridge fusion experiment that offers a potential alternative to the tokamak, now the only type of fusion experiment supported in the United States. But the report adds that fiscal reality—which might mean years of shrinking budgets—could not only derail these plans but would eventually devastate the entire U.S. fusion program.

Under heavy budget pressure in the late 1980s and early 1990s, DOE killed off a variety of fusion experiments based on alternative



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Polishing the doughnut. The ATF might soon be back in business.

designs to the popular tokamak. Among those were the Advanced Toroidal Facility (ATF) at Oak Ridge, a “stellarator” that relies on

external magnetic coils, rather than a current run through the plasma itself, to control the magnetic bottle that contains the

plasma. While the ATF has been stalled, Japan and Germany have moved forward with stellarator machines of their own.

Now DOE's Fusion Energy Advisory Committee has suggested restarting the ATF sometime in 1994, although it notes that flat budgets will curtail operations, and declining budgets would make it difficult, if not impossible, to operate the machine. Physicists, however, are applauding the recommendation: “It's silly to put one's eggs all in the tokamak basket,” says Terry Davies, associate administrator of UCLA's Institute for Plasma Physics. But the final decision will rest with DOE and Congress—two institutions where the best of intentions have frequently died messy deaths.

Malaria Vaccine to Face an Acid Test

The World Health Organization may soon help resolve a 5-year-old controversy over a malarial vaccine with plans for a field trial in a Tanzanian village that suffers one of the world's highest rates of malaria transmission.

Many U.S. and European researchers have long been skeptical of vaccine claims from Colombian biochemist Manuel Patarroyo, charging that his vaccine trials were inadequate and that other researchers have until recently been unable to replicate his reported success in protecting monkeys from the disease. Next January, however, an international

team of scientists will begin double-blinded, randomized field tests of Patarroyo's vaccine in 600 children aged 1 to 5 from a village where 80% of children carry the malaria parasite.

Some researchers are already warning that this extreme environment may prove too much of a challenge. But Pedro Alonso, a leader of the Spanish group involved in the Tanzanian trial, says that Patarroyo's vaccine might still work in an area of “less intensive transmission” like Colombia, even if it fails in Tanzania.

In fact, Patarroyo claims to have recently completed a 1500-subject trial in Colombia that shows that the vaccine is effective.

But researchers should be careful about accepting Patarroyo's latest results—his previous trials have been criticized for failing to meet acceptable standards of randomization and double blind-controls.

NIH Officials Huddle With AIDS Activists

A few years ago, hundreds of AIDS activists stormed the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to protest what they saw as a lack of leadership, faltering drug research, and inexcusable funding gaps in the fight against AIDS. The activists' complaints haven't changed—but this year, instead of raising the barricades, NIH Director Bernadine Healy invited the activists in to

meet with her and the directors of all 18 NIH institutes (or their proxies)—a move that demonstrates just how much relations between NIH and the activist community have warmed.

The 10 September meeting has left the participants gushing with enthusiasm. “It was fabulous, absolutely fabulous,” Healy says. “Some directors were really queasy—they thought I was walking them into the lion's mouth.” But by the meeting's end, Healy says, “the institute directors learned that this was an impressive group of public citizens.” Mark Harrington of New York's Treatment Action Group (TAG)—joined by TAG's Gregg Gonsalves and Derek Link, Martin Delaney from Project Inform, and Derek Hodel from the AIDS Action Council—was also pleased, calling the meeting “helpful on a number of fronts.”

Healy organized the meeting after reading a two-volume, 200-page “critical review” of AIDS research that Harrington and Gonsalves distributed in July. One of their central conclusions: NIH's Office of AIDS Research should have more power and accountability—an idea that's gaining momentum in political circles as well as in the activist community.

The Forces of Pork Strike Back

A few weeks ago, when Representative George Brown (D-CA) managed through a legislative maneuver to yank \$95 million of academic pork-barrel projects from the energy and water appropriations bill, it must have seemed to many scientists too good to be true (*Science*, 2 October, p. 22). And it was. Last Monday, the pork Brown had excised was surreptitiously slipped back—word for word—into a defense appropriations bill that passed on a voice vote just hours before Congress adjourned.

Brown has long argued that “earmarks” of this kind damage not only the peer-review system, but also the rules that govern Congress itself. None of the projects in question, which mostly benefit power-

ful members of the House and Senate appropriations committees, had ever been discussed in public—one reason Brown was able to prevail the first time around.

This time, however, the pork was particularly difficult to stop, because the 1000-page text of the defense bill wasn't available until noon on 5 October—just 2 hours before the final vote was scheduled to take place. Furthermore, so few copies of the bill were printed that only members themselves were allowed to read them. Brown did read the text, found the pork, and tried to muster opposition on the floor, but it was too late—members were anxious to leave town and start campaigning for reelection.