

Senate rejects plea for greenhouse-gas research funds

[WASHINGTON] Senate appropriators have ignored a Department of Energy request for additional research funding to help the United States reduce its greenhouse gas emissions. But they have agreed to fully fund the department's scientific programmes.

The Senate's energy and water appropriations subcommittee, chaired by Pete Domenici (Republican, New Mexico), rejected increases in solar and geothermal energy research that had been requested under the administration's Climate Change Technology Initiative (see *Nature* 391, 619; 1998).

But the panel supported the modest increases requested for the science programmes, which support most physics research in the United States, and for the construction of the Advanced Neutron Spallation Source at Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee.

Modest additional funding for renewable energy research is the only significant action that the Clinton administration has proposed to cut greenhouse gas emissions since it signed the Kyoto protocol last November, and its rejection by the Senate is a serious blow to any compromise between the administration and opponents of the accord.

Vice-President Al Gore said on Monday (8 June) that he would keep fighting for the initiative, citing new data that global temperatures reached record average highs in the first five months of the year.

Prize for creator of the World Wide Web

[MUNICH] Tim Berners-Lee, creator of the World Wide Web, has received this year's DM200,000 (US\$112,700) Eduard Rhein Foundation prize for technology, one of the most valuable such prizes in Europe. Berners-Lee created the World Wide Web while working at the European Particle Physics Laboratory (CERN) in Geneva.

The Eduard Rhein Foundation prize for basic research was awarded to Jacob Ziv, president of the Israel Academy of Sciences, for his pioneering work on information and coding theories.

Rhein was a German writer and inventor who died in 1993.

Prusiner was turned down for UK BSE grant

[LONDON] Two of Britain's main food research agencies rejected in 1991 an application for a grant, to assess the risks to humans of eating beef infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), from

Stanley Prusiner, the winner of the 1997 Nobel prize for his work on prions. He is professor of neurology and biochemistry at the University of California, San Francisco.

Prusiner wanted to use transgenic mouse models to assess the risk of humans contracting a fatal prion disease from eating BSE-infected beef. He applied with a British collaborator — Gareth Roberts — to the agriculture ministry and to the Agriculture and Food Research Council in 1991, when the UK government believed that beef was safe to eat.

A second application, in 1996, was also rejected. "I would argue that this was a major mistake," Prusiner told the public inquiry into BSE last week. "It is not as though we gave up."

NASA retains manager for Hubble's successor

[WASHINGTON] The US Space Telescope Science Institute last week got a new lease on the future. The US space agency NASA has selected the Baltimore, Maryland-based institute to manage science operations for the Next Generation Space Telescope (NGST) proposed for launch in 2007. The institute currently manages the Hubble Space Telescope from the campus of Johns Hopkins University under contract to the Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy.

The European Space Agency recently began its own study of the NGST project, which is expected to involve substantial European participation. An international workshop on scientific priorities for the NGST will be held next week in Liège, Belgium.

Euro parliament stands firm on Framework cash

[MUNICH] The European Parliament's research committee has rejected the European Council's proposal for financing the European Union's fifth five-year Framework programme of research (FP5) to the tune of ECU14 billion (US\$15.5 billion). As expected, the committee is holding out for ECU16.3 billion, the figure originally proposed by the commission, and a small reduction to the sum parliament had proposed in its first reading.

The full parliamentary plenary session is almost certain to approve this sum in its second reading of the Framework programme proposal next week, and the issue will then go to arbitration.

The conciliation procedure will also have to resolve a second disagreement over the financing of FP5 — Spain's refusal to vote on issues involving financing after 1999 as part of its battle to persuade the European Union to maintain its subsidies to Spain after this date.

Neutrinos are not as light as light

[LONDON] The Super-Kamiokande experiment in Japan has measured a non-zero mass for the neutrino. The announcement, made on 4 June, was based on two years of data that reveal an 'oscillation' of one type of neutrino into another. This is only possible if neutrinos — unlike photons, the particles of light — have some mass. A preliminary detection was made months ago (see *Nature* 391, 123–124; 1998), but the team is now more sure of its results.

The discovery of oscillations could solve the 'missing solar neutrino' problem, and means that neutrinos form some part of the 'dark matter' that must be present in the Universe. But, as the standard model of particle physics predicts that the neutrino has zero mass, it appears that a new fundamental theory of physics is needed.

Judge fails to see the joke in improbable feud

[BOSTON] A judge in the Illinois federal district court has dismissed the complaint by the publisher of one science humour magazine against the editor of another. George Scherr, publisher of the *Journal of Irreproducible Results*, had accused Marc Abrahams, editor of rival magazine the *Annals of Improbable Research* (see *Nature* 389, 431; 1997), of libel, racketeering, "massive perversion and fraud" and other improprieties. But the court ruled that these alleged offences were outside the jurisdiction of Illinois.

Scherr can appeal against the decision or file lawsuits in other states. But lawyers familiar with the case say the judge's ruling will make it harder, and more expensive, for him to pursue his grievance. Meanwhile, Scherr is pressing forward with his campaign for ownership of the term "Ig Nobel Prize" — a claim that has been rejected by the US Patent and Trademark Office, and subsequently appealed against.

Time runs out for historic astronomical instrument

[LONDON] An unknown seventeenth-century designer of astronomical instruments is believed to be among the first to put the 'millennium bug' into a piece of equipment. His — or her — identity is not known. But their brass Equatorium instrument, housed in the Liverpool Museum, in northwest England, will stop working at midnight on 31 December 1999. "It is a little sad that the working life of this 400-year-old, unique instrument comes to a close in 18 months," says Martin Suggett, curator of Earth and physical sciences at the museum.