

Clinton 'will seek extra \$1bn for biomedical research'

[WASHINGTON] President Bill Clinton is reported to have decided to seek a substantial increase in the budget of the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) of \$1 billion, or nearly 8 per cent, in the budget request for 1999 that he plans to send to the Congress next month.

White House officials are said to have told *The New York Times* that Clinton has given his assent to the increase in the budget of the \$13.65-billion-a-year agency. Only last month Clinton declared that the next 50 years "will very likely be characterized predominantly as an age of biology".

Leading members of Congress have already indicated their intention to seek a substantially larger increase for the NIH. Congressman John Porter (Republican, Illinois), the chairman of a key House of Representatives spending subcommittee, has repeatedly called for a boost of at least \$2.5 billion for NIH in 1999 (see *Nature* 390, 6; 1997). And in November the Speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich, urged a doubling of spending on biological research (see *Nature* 390, 321; 1997).

The 8 per cent increase would mark a departure for Clinton, who in 1997 and 1998 asked for NIH increases of 3.9 per cent and 2.6 per cent respectively; Congress granted increases of 6.9 per cent and 7.1 per cent.

Germany goes Dutch for climate change research

[MUNICH] The Netherlands and Germany are to collaborate in research on climate change and sea and ocean management. Scientists from the Netherlands Institute for Sea Research, on the North Sea island of Texel, and from four research institutes in Bremen, on Germany's North Sea coast, are to co-operate in a project called NEBROC (Netherlands Bremen Oceanography).

The joint venture was approved by the science ministers of the Netherlands, Germany and Bremen at a meeting last autumn on the German polar research vessel *Polarstern* (*Polar Star*).

Funding for the research programme will come equally from both countries, with Germany and the Netherlands having each agreed to donate Dfl800,000 (US\$443,700) a year for the next five years. The institutes will share their facilities, including research vessels, and will set up a college — the European Graduate College for Marine Sciences — at which 21 young scientists will research areas such as climate history and oceanic carbon cycles.

UK funding boost for laboratory equipment

[LONDON] Britain's Wellcome Trust has linked with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to launch an initiative to provide funds for research equipment in universities. A new Infrastructure Panel has been set up by the trust to channel £15 million (US\$25 million) a year into support for large equipment and refurbishment grants; applicants for the latter must already be in receipt of "substantial trust funding". The panel will also administer a Joint Equipment Initiative with the HEFCE.

Under the joint initiative, the funding council will provide half of the funding agreed by the trust for some items of equipment costing between £200,000 and £2 million. According to Brian Fender, the chief executive of HEFCE, the partnership will help to develop "a more strategic approach to infrastructure funding".

German company set up to exploit genome data

[MUNICH] A new biotechnology company, Artemis, is to be set up in Germany on the initiative of Christiane Nüsslein-Volhard, director of the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Biology in Tübingen and winner of the 1995 Nobel prize for medicine. Artemis's research will concentrate on possible medical applications of Nüsslein-Volhard's findings about the zebrafish genome and similar results by Klaus Rajewski, head of the department of immunology at the University of Cologne, from his work with mice.

Both Nüsslein-Volhard and Rajewski will keep their present research positions, and will act only as advisers for Artemis. Headed by Peter Stadler, a former research head of Bayer, Artemis will cooperate with the US company Exelixis, based in San Francisco. In the spring, six scientists — four of whom are former members of Nüsslein-Volhard's and Rajewski's research groups — begin research in laboratories in Tübingen and Cologne.

\$1.8m pay-out over radioactive oatmeal

[WASHINGTON] The Quaker Oats Company and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) have agreed to pay \$1.85 million to settle a lawsuit involving the feeding of radioactive oatmeal to boys in the 1940s and 1950s. The class action lawsuit was brought by several dozen plaintiffs among more than 100 who participated in the experiment.

The boys had been fed cereal containing radioactive iron and calcium in an experiment seeking to trace the absorption

of the oats throughout the body. MIT, whose president apologized for the experiment in 1994, issued a statement last week pointing out that no discernible health effects were found by a state task force that reported in 1994. But lawyers for the plaintiffs said that the consent form used in the experiment neglected to mention that the oatmeal contained radioactivity.

Call for a shake-up at Robert Koch Institute

[MUNICH] In one of its most critical assessments, Germany's science council, the Wissenschaftsrat, has recommended that the historic Robert Koch Institute in Berlin be restructured from top to bottom. The institute was founded in 1891 as Germany's centre for control of infectious diseases. But it has recently been growing in an apparently haphazard way, forming loose attachments to other institutes rather than absorbing them. The newest attachments are the German AIDS Centre and the Institute for Epidemiology and Social Medicine.

The Wissenschaftsrat has now recommended that the management structure of the institute be streamlined and that the institute be restricted to its original brief of handling infectious disease. It also suggests that the variable quality of research carried out at the institute be improved by focusing on fewer themes and by forcing research groups to compete more for institutional money.

Aharonov and Berry win Wolf physics prize

[LONDON] An Israeli and a British physicist have shared this year's Wolf Prize in physics, awarded by the Israeli-based Wolf Foundation, for "the discovery of quantum topological and geometrical phases" — changes to the phase of quantum-



mechanical wavefunctions as a result of topological and geometrical transformations — "and their incorporation into many fields of physics".



Yakir Aharonov (top left), who holds teaching posts at the University of South Carolina in the United States and Tel Aviv University, and Sir Michael Berry (below left), professor of physics at the University of Bristol, will share the \$100,000 prize.

Both have their names associated with important phenomena in quantum physics: Aharonov was the co-discoverer with the late David Bohm of the 'Aharonov-Bohm effect', and Berry is known for the 'Berry phase'.