

Lawmakers slash funds for nuclear research facility

The US Senate voted on 1 July to cut all construction funding for a major nuclear-weapons research facility in California, despite the fact that the government has already spent \$2.8 billion on it.

The National Ignition Facility (NIF) at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California is designed to use 192 lasers to study fusion and investigate atomic reactions such as those that take place inside nuclear bombs. The complex is 80% complete.

But the Senate sliced \$146 million that was earmarked for NIF from a Department of Energy funding bill for the 2006 fiscal year. Senator Pete Domenici (Republican, New Mexico) led the charge to stop funding for NIF. Facilities in his state compete for limited funds from the Department of Energy.

Officials at Lawrence Livermore say they are very concerned about the survival of NIF, which now employs about 1,000 scientific staff and has faced sharp scrutiny before for running over budget (see *Nature* 401, 195; 1999).

Retract emissions pledge, exhorts Russian sceptic

A prominent Russian scientist, well known for his scepticism about global warming (see *Nature* 431, 12–13; 2004), says that the Russian Academy of Sciences was in error when it signed a joint statement on climate change along with ten other national science academies.

Last week, Yuri Izrael, chairman of a climate committee for the Russian academy, said that the group does not in fact support the 8 June statement, which calls for immediate action to slow the emission of greenhouse gases. He called on the academy's president, Yuri Osipov, to reconsider his signature.

The US National Academy of Sciences has also run into a few stumbling blocks over its participation. It endorsed the statement but disavowed a strongly worded press release about the agreement, issued by the London-based Royal Society — another signatory.

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Crunch point: NASA probe wallops comet

In a perfectly targeted dive, part of NASA's Deep Impact spacecraft smashed into comet Tempel 1 at 5:52 GMT on 4 July, releasing a spray of ancient debris from the comet's core.

The first pictures show a much larger plume than expected (above), suggesting that the comet's crust is more fragile than was thought. The debris contains material left over from the formation of our Solar System; further analysis

should reveal a cocktail of chemicals that once bombarded the primitive Earth.

NASA pushed ahead with the mission despite a US\$300-million lawsuit brought by Russian astrologer Marina Bai, who claimed that the collision could damage the natural balance of the Universe.

For an in-depth account of the impact, see www.nature.com/news.

Pesticide testing breeds discontent in the Senate

The US Senate has voted to ban the Environmental Protection Agency from testing pesticides on humans or using data from any previous such tests.

The ban was put in place during Bill Clinton's administration, but has recently lapsed. Senator Barbara Boxer (Democrat, California) reintroduced it, criticizing several ongoing pesticide studies.

The Senate also passed a competing amendment, which requires the agency to review the conditions in such tests but does not ban them outright. Negotiators will have to find a compromise between the two.

Bush bumps up aid for malaria control in Africa

The US president, George W. Bush, has said he will send \$1.2 billion in aid to Africa over the next five years to fight malaria.

The investment, announced last week in advance of the G8 summit, will target 175 million people in at least 15 countries.

Tanzania, Uganda and Angola will receive money next year; others will benefit later.

Public-health experts welcomed the promise of more aid, and hope the money will pan out as planned. Malaria kills more than a million people annually — most of them are children in Africa.

California legislators fail to hobble stem-cell research

California's \$3-billion stem-cell programme has survived a legislative attempt to make its funding and research more transparent, clearing the way for the first allocation of funds later this year.

Certain state legislators argued that there should be a statewide ballot this November to address transparency in the programme (see *Nature* 435, 544; 2005). But the lawmakers failed to win support for their idea.

Leaders of the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine, which is gearing up to spend \$300 million a year on stem-cell research for the next decade, are drawing up disclosure policies to address some of the concerns.