



Submerging the facts: defence officials keep renewal plans under wraps.

R. AD SHEAR; THE MILITARY PICTURE LIBRARY/CORBIS

Bodies such as the National Academy of Sciences are also commissioned by the federal government to report on security issues.

Critics assert that the British approach skews decision making. John Finney, a physicist at University College London and a member of Pugwash, which campaigns to reduce armed conflict, says: "Without the technical information and costings of the different options, the agenda can be driven by industrial interests rather than those of national security."

Jim Giles

See Editorial, page 459.

Samuelson, founder of the Parkinson's Action Network, told *Nature* on 29 January. "We need to think about what talents and what skill set we need in the new president. And we should be clear about that before we write a job description," she said.

The search committee's agenda for this week's meeting includes considering the president's job summary, application criteria and a 'potential timetable' for hiring.

Batthey is highly respected within the NIH as an able

administrator who rarely makes trouble, but who will speak frankly when necessary. During the controversy over tightened

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conflict-of-interest rules at the agency, Batthey said bluntly that if it adopted the stringent set of rules that was first proposed, he would resign (see *Nature* 435, 397; 2005). The rules were loosened

before they were finalized.

Batthey's absence from his NIH stem-cell duties became publicly apparent at a 19 January Senate committee hearing on human embryonic stem-cell research. There, Story Landis, director of the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, testified on behalf of the agency. She is now acting chair of the Stem Cell Task Force. It has also emerged that Batthey will not be attending a meeting of stem-cell funding agencies being held in Singapore this week.

The CIRM was created by California voters in a November 2004 ballot initiative as a state agency dedicated to making grants and loans for human embryonic stem-cell research and facilities. But its work has so far been held up by litigation challenging the ballot. With an end to that litigation now on the horizon, "it's a crucial moment in our history", says Samuelson. "The choice of a president can have a lot to do with how much we move ahead and how fast." ■ Meredith Wadman

## Bush splashes out on ocean research

A group of the United States' top ocean specialists this week issued a 'report card' on how the government is treating the sea. And if President George W. Bush had brought home in his school days the grades he received from that exercise, his mother would not have been impressed. The worst grade of all — an F for 'fail' — was for new funding of ocean programmes.

But just before the report was released on 30 January, Bush officials declared that the president will request \$143 million more for the oceans in his 2008 budget than in 2007. Of this, \$80 million will be for research, with focuses on an ocean monitoring network, comparative analysis of marine ecosystems, and research on the water circulation in the Atlantic.

The Bush administration's announcement also listed some legislative goals for the year. These included acceding to the United Nations Law of the Sea and passing specific authorizing legislation for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the main ocean-research agency, to increase its political heft.

Carlos Gutierrez, head of

the commerce department of which NOAA is part, says the plan will "sharpen our focus and expand our knowledge of our oceans, which is incredibly important for everything we do in the future".

But most years, NOAA gets far more money from Congress than the president requests. So critics of Bush were quick to dismiss the announcement's significance.

"The president's 2007 request provided \$300 million less for ocean, coastal and Great Lakes programmes in research and resource management at NOAA than Congress gave the agency in 2006," says Bart Gordon (Democrat, Tennessee), chair of the House Committee on Science and Technology. "While this year's budget request is an improvement, I suspect this is still disappointing news to

those who want to see more attention paid to ocean and coastal issues."

James Watkins, chair of the congressionally mandated Commission on Ocean Policy, which in 2004 recommended a far-reaching effort to bolster US ocean research, is also unconvinced. "I have been around this town for 50 years and I have always been a bit leery of rhetoric versus reality when it comes to the budget," he says of Bush's plan for ocean research. "We need \$750 million to get this kick-started — that's one day in Iraq."

Gerald Leape, vice-president for marine conservation at the National Environmental Trust in Washington DC, says he is "sceptical" about the Bush plan, but is generally hopeful about the budgetary outlook for ocean research this year. ■ Emma Marris



Commerce secretary Carlos Gutierrez introduces Bush's plan to investigate the deep.

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