



Hug the messengers. Representative Bill Foster (at podium) and other dignitaries delivered good news last week to Fermilab scientists.

reprogrammed \$9 million of that amount this spring to cover salaries for the U.S. ITER offices, most of which are at Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL) in Tennessee. Foster calls the \$15.5 million a “symbolic” gesture that keeps the United States in the game. But the money won’t go for equipment, thanks to a likely delay in adoption of the 2009 budget beyond the 1 October start of the next fiscal year. “We have to hold it in reserve to avoid laying off the whole project team on October 1,” says ORNL Director Thom Mason.

Persis Drell, director of the Stanford Lin-

ear Accelerator Center in Menlo Park, California, says she would have preferred Congress to have given DOE more leeway in how to spend the money. Its decision to cut funding for ITER and Fermilab, she says, “was the cause of the disaster in the 2008 budget, and I’m not any happier with [language] in the supplemental” that focuses on jobs. And Lubell and others warn that Fermi and other labs may have to reinstitute layoffs if DOE’s science budget does not increase significantly next year.

—ADRIAN CHO

With reporting by Eli Kintisch.

to form the basis of knowledge” on various topics. But political scientist Howard Silver, executive director of the Consortium of Social Science Associations in Washington, D.C., thinks the infusion of NSF-caliber researchers could reap more immediate benefits. “If [the U.S. government] had done a better job of listening to the cultural and language needs in Iraq, things might have worked very differently,” says Silver.

Will NSF’s involvement provide sufficient cover for the Pentagon? Silver thinks “the proper protections” are in place, including promises that the Pentagon-supported research will be unclassified and that scientists will be able to publish without interference. Cognitive psychologist Baruch Fischhoff of Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, says academic reviewers should ensure top-notch applicants. But Brown University anthropologist Catherine Lutz fears that the Pentagon dollars will militarize her field by potentially “pulling people off” other projects that are unrelated to defense. She and many colleagues are upset by another DOD program,

called Human Terrain Teams, that has partnered social scientists with U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan in an effort to better understand those cultures.

The Pentagon’s involvement in the social sciences could reach beyond areas of interest to the military. The NSF-DOD memorandum allows defense officials to consider funding some proposals submitted to NSF’s \$38-million-per-year Human and Social Dynamics (HSD) program in risks and human behavior and decision-making. That would make NSF’s dollars go farther.

University of California, Irvine, psychologist Roxane Cohen Silver, whose current HSD grant expires next year, says she’d have no problem taking no-strings-attached Pentagon dollars, especially “if that then opened up additional funding for social sciences.” Fischhoff, who chairs the Department of Homeland Security’s scientific advisory board, says that social scientists can sharpen their thinking by working with officials in defense and other “real life” fields. “They will press you on the quality of your data,” he says.

—ELI KINTISCH

Dutch Limit Iranian Access

Iranian-born scientists and students are upset by new Dutch regulations, announced last week, that ban them from nine fields of study and five research facilities where they might have access to nuclear technology. The Dutch government says the rules are an implementation of U.N. Security Council resolution 1737, which seeks to limit Iran’s access to nuclear technology (*Science*, 1 February, p. 556).

But the new rules are the strictest of any country and are unfairly singling out one group, critics say. “This stigmatizes the next generation of Iranian scientists,” says Nasser Kalantar of the Nuclear Physics Accelerator Institute in Groningen, the Netherlands, who says he plans to investigate whether the measure is constitutional. Peyman Jafari of the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam hopes the Dutch parliament will intervene. The Netherlands is particularly sensitive to the issue because Abdul Qadeer Khan, the so-called father of Pakistan’s nuclear program, passed on highly classified material to Pakistan while working at a Dutch uranium-enrichment plant in the 1970s.

—MARTIN ENSERINK

Yellow Light for British Science

After months of hearing from anxious astronomers and physicists, the United Kingdom’s Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) has detailed its plans to spend \$3.9 billion over the next 3 years. Despite new investments in projects that include the proposed Extremely Large Telescope and the FAIR nuclear center in Germany, many researchers are angry that STFC will still reduce university research grants and ax support to fields such as gamma-ray astronomy and ground-based solar-terrestrial physics.

Because of commitments it inherited when formed last year from two U.K. funding bodies, STFC was short of cash and announced a swath of cuts (*Science*, 21 December 2007, p. 1851). Researchers were up in arms and parliamentarians joined the chorus of criticism, prompting the council to embark on a 3-month consultation.

In STFC’s updated plans, some cuts have evaporated, such as those to the Gemini telescopes in Hawaii and Chile, and a financial lifeline has been thrown to the iconic Jodrell Bank telescope near Manchester, although partners will be needed to achieve full funding. But cuts remain. “The U.K. should be playing a leading role instead of hanging on to the coattails of others,” says nuclear physicist William Gelletly of the University of Surrey.

—DANIEL CLERY

ACOUSTICAL SCIENCE

Major European Cities Are Quietly Missing Antinoise Deadline

PARIS—The Europeans have many words for noise—bruit, Lärm, fracasso—but few plans for reducing it. At a conference* here in France's noisy capital last week, European acoustical scientists admitted that they and most policymakers are not close to meeting an 18 July deadline to develop action plans to shush the European Union's (E.U.'s) largest cities.

Chronic noise has increasingly been linked to sleep problems, poor education, and even serious heart disease. Yet urban noise reduction is a daunting—and expensive—task; most scientists are still struggling just to locate noise hot spots.

The action plan deadline stems from a 2002 E.U. antinoise directive. "Europe has a bigger noise problem than the United States," says Gaetano Licitra, an environmental acoustics consultant helping the Italian region of Tuscany muffle its noise. "Instead of spreading out in suburbs, we tend to both live and work in the same area, and our cities more often have railroads going right through the center and nearby airports."

The first stage of the E.U. directive required mapping noise levels in all cities with at least 250,000 people. This is largely done with virtual models of cities that estimate people's average exposure to loud sound sources such as automobile, railroad, and airplane traffic and industry. One problem is that an urban noise map is a moving target, with infrastructure and traffic patterns constantly changing. Another is that "noise is not the same thing as loudness," says Brigitte Schulte-Fortkamp, an environmental acoustician at the Technical University in Berlin. "Loudness is physical and can be measured in decibels with a sound meter, but noise is a psychological phenomenon."

People are far more tolerant of sound levels depending on the context and source,

researchers noted at the meeting. Relatively loud natural sounds from birds and water, for example, can put people at ease, whereas quieter sources, such as an electrical buzz, cause stress. Surveys have also found large variation in noise tolerance among people and even between whole communities.

So far, despite a June 2007 deadline for the noise maps, only a handful of major European cities have charted their soundscapes. Even fewer are close to proposing an antinoise action plan. "Most realize they will miss the deadline," says Schulte-Fortkamp. "Now there is a scramble to finish" because failure to comply will result in stiff fines in a few years. An exception is Berlin. Not only has the city mapped its noise, but an action plan is already in public consultation.

Most of the noise reduction in cities will come from changing transportation infrastructure, strictly regulating where trucks can travel, and relocating speed bumps and traffic lights, for example. One high-tech solution discussed at the meeting is to make the noise sources quieter. Nils-Åke Nilsson, an acoustic engineer based in Täby, Sweden, reported that asphalt containing grains of rubber hushed traffic significantly in sections of the Swedish city of Göteborg. Another strategy noted is insulating buildings better from outside noise. Pierre Leroy, a materials scientist at the French National Center for Scientific Research in Marseille, introduced a

"smart foam" that efficiently dampens not only high-frequency sounds, such as the screech of brakes, but also the more difficult low-frequency sounds made by truck engines and underground trains. The foam could be incorporated into walls and road barriers.

The complexity of dealing with noise is daunting, but E.U. cities are also dragging their feet, says Licitra, because "once you have an action plan, then you have to start spending real money to address the problem, and that will cost billions."

—JOHN BOHANNON



Taking action. Berlin (above) has a plan to reduce urban noise from sources such as traffic.

Academic Hackers in Court

A Dutch court is set to decide whether academic researchers can reveal how they cracked one of the most widely used security cards in the world. Chip producer NXP of the Netherlands has sued to prevent computer scientists from Radboud University in Nijmegen from discussing the topic at an October symposium in Spain. As part of a program to identify security weaknesses, the researchers announced in March that they had figured out how to "clone" MIFARE Classic, a chip used in hundreds of millions of building security and transit cards. Bart Jacobs, who led the work, says that academic freedom is at stake; NXP is "trying to kill the messenger," he says. A company spokesperson declined to comment. A verdict is expected before 14 July, the deadline to submit final papers for the Málaga meeting.

—MARTIN ENSERINK

Postdocs Unionize

The 5000-odd postdocs at the University of California (UC) may be on the verge of forming the biggest postdoc union in the United States. More than 3000 UC postdocs have signed cards to be represented by the United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW), according to Matthew O'Connor, a bioengineering postdoc at UC Berkeley who helped collect the signatures. "Many of us realized that [popular] postdoctoral associations are great for professional networking and career development but are not as well equipped to deal with issues like wages and benefits," says O'Connor. Previous attempts to unionize have failed to gain state certification (*Science*, 10 November 2006, p. 909). If the postdocs clear that hurdle, the next step is collective bargaining with UC officials.

—YUDHIJIT BHATTACHARJEE

CNRS Reforms Adopted

PARIS—A controversial plan to create a series of new institutes within France's National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) was approved by the center's board on 1 July. Scientist labor unions gave up their resistance after last-minute concessions from the French government, including dropping the idea to give some of the new institutes a privileged "national" status. The plan is a general outline, however; Jean-Luc Mazet of union SNCS-FSU predicts that "the battle will resume" when details are hammered out in a contract between CNRS and the government this fall.

—MARTIN ENSERINK

*Acoustics'08, Paris, 29 June to 4 July.