

## Will Commerce Dept See It to the New Year Intact?

After Labor Day, the U.S. Congress briefly turned its budgetary scalpels on the Department of Commerce, home of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) and several other programs and initiatives that involve materials research. Last spring, Congress, as part of its Budget Resolution, had decided this department should be dissolved, though not necessarily by the beginning of FY 1996.

Before the August recess, the House passed H.R. 2076, which funds the department at 83% of its current level, but the budget reconciliation bill—which will detail how the budget will be balanced—may take some or all of that away. At press time, the House and Senate seemed unlikely to agree to do that, and even if Congress did pass such a law, President Clinton planned to veto it.

Most of NIST's materials R&D takes place in the Materials Science and Engineering Laboratory, with some percentage occurring in the Electronics and Electrical Engineering Laboratory and in the Chemical Science and Technology Laboratory, for a total of about \$50 million per year. But no one knows what will happen for FY 1996.

Even as appropriations committees haggled over details of the commerce department's budget, other committees in both the House and Senate called for the dismantling of the agency altogether. In early September, Rep. Dick Chrysler (R-MI) convinced the House Government Reform Subcommittee to put forth such a bill (H.R. 1756), arguing that abolishing Commerce would save some \$7.7 billion over the next five years.

Commerce Secretary Ron Brown said that terminating or transferring programs would actually cost taxpayers an additional \$1.542 billion. He said that the House Commerce Appropriations bill reflected the government's ability to save money without destroying the department and that the department's technology-assistance programs were essential to maintaining the country's global competitiveness.

Despite these protests, 11 committees, each with jurisdiction over part of this department, spent much of September putting their mark on Chrysler's bill. Chrysler's version had also called for the selling of NIST's laboratories and those of NOAA's Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research to the private sector

and the termination of the Advanced Technology Program (ATP) and Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP).

The House Science Committee, which deals with the science and technology sections of the commerce department, modified these proposals. If those modifications survive the bill's many revisions, NIST laboratories and those NOAA programs could shift to a new agency to be called the U.S. Science and Technology Administration. Rep. Robert Walker (R-PA), chair of the House Science Committee, has also discussed the possibility of new legislation that would fold the Department of Commerce into a new Department of Science. The committee's current bill formally terminates ATP. Not all of the science committee members were happy about the outcome. "What we are left with," said George Brown (D-CA), "is a bill that does more harm than good."

Meanwhile, the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee, led by William Roth (R-DE), made similar strides, through legislation introduced by Spencer Abraham (R-MI), toward demolishing the commerce department, despite strong protests from Carl Levin (D-MI) and several other Democratic senators.

"Most of [these proposals] represent very little understanding of what we actually do here," said Lyle Schwartz, who heads materials for NIST. "We're not very excited about any of the options that are being proposed."

However, the outcome may not be as bleak as these committee actions imply. Many senators strongly support some commerce programs and have called for the creation of new agencies to take over these activities. In August, the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, chaired by Larry Pressler (R-SD), presented a three-year authorization bill (S. 1141) for the department's technology programs that includes some support for NIST's extramural programs.

ELIZABETH PENNISI

## Downsizing Expected at DOE Labs

The September 11 issue of *New Technology Week*, a publication of King Communications Group, Inc. in Washington, DC, listed expected steps to be taken by managers at the various laboratories under the Department of Energy.

In preparation of impending budget reductions, **Argonne National Laboratory** implemented an early retirement

program for staff employed in the nuclear reactor research and development program and expects layoffs in the coming months; **Brookhaven National Laboratory** expects to lay off close to 90 employees; **Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory** sees a possible staff reduction of 100; **Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory** laid off 89 employees and reduced staff by another 62 employees through voluntary separation; **Los Alamos National Laboratory** has projected numbers of layoffs up to 1,100; **National Renewable Energy Laboratory** expects to lose as many as 45 positions through a voluntary retirement program and attrition but declined public comment concerning possible layoffs; and **Pacific Northwest Laboratory** has already reduced staff by 800 employees through layoffs and voluntary departures and retirements.

**Ames Laboratory, Continuous Electron Beam Accelerator Facility, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory, and Stanford Linear Accelerator Center** have not taken steps yet to reduce staff while awaiting the final word on budget cuts.

## Report Summarizes Potential Benefits of DOE-Supported Industrial Technology Partnerships

The role of the federal government in stimulating improved industrial energy efficiency, competitiveness, and environmental quality through the use of technology partnerships is detailed in a report issued by the Department of Energy's Office of Industrial Technologies (OIT). The two-volume report, "Technology Partnerships," describes how OIT works with industry, specifically profiling the energy, economic, and environmental characteristics of the chemical, petroleum refining, pulp and paper, steel, aluminum, foundry, and glass industries that together use nearly 80% of energy used in the United States by industry. The report also describes DOE-supported research, development, and demonstration (RD&D) activities relating to these and other industries as well as quantitative estimates of the benefits of current OIT-supported technologies. For more information or to order copies of the report, contact DOE's Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Customer Service Center, PO Box 3048, Merrifield, VA 22116; 1-800-DOE-EREC or 1-800-273-2957 (hearing impaired); e-mail [energyinfo@delphi.com](mailto:energyinfo@delphi.com). □