in universities or if the country should adopt a more pluralistic system along the lines of the German model, with the government supporting work at universities and the Max Planck Institutes. The task force met again on 13 and 26 September to complete an agenda that it might use when it begins its two-year study in January. Two examples of questions on its agenda: "Are the Nobel Prizes a useful measure of a nation's strengths in science?" "Is 'getting research grants' replacing the actual conduct of research as an incentive for university scientists?"

Just about every task force member voiced a particular interest. Representative Larry Winn Jr. (R-Kan.) suggested the study should give special attention to the peer review process. Winn's concern was underscored by Representative Buddy MacKay (D-Fla.), who announced his unhappiness with the way NSF and NIH make grants and awards. Once a funding direction is decided by those agencies, he complained, changing it is as difficult as turning around a supertanker at full speed.

Besides Fuqua, MacKay and Winn, the members of the task force are Herbert H. Bateman (R-Va.), Sherwood L. Boeklert (R-NY), Frederick C. Boucher (D-Va.), George E. Brown Jr (D-Cal.), Mervyn M. Dymally (D-Cal.), Judd Gregg (R-NH), Tom Lewis (R-Fla.), Manuel Lujan Jr (R-NM), Stan Lundine (D-NY), Alfred A. McCandless (R-Cal.), Norman Y. Mineta (D-Cal.), Harry M. Reid (D-Nev.), Joe Skeen (R-NM), Harold L. Volkmer (D-Mo.) and Doug Walgren (D-Pa.). —IG

FUQUA

# Bloch wins Senate approval as NSF head

Erich Bloch received Senate confirmation as director of the National Science Foundation without a single nay on 6 August on a motion by Senator Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.). Kennedy, who serves as chairman of the Senate subcommittee that oversees NSF, voiced worry about a "serious void in the leadership at this important agency," since Edward A. Knapp had resigned and returned to Los Alamos in July. Because of the rush to complete its business before the 98th Congress adjourns for the elections and the noncontroversial nature of the appointment of Bloch, IBM vice president of technical personnel development, the Senate leadership decided against holding the customary hearings on the nomination.

Bloch was sworn in by President Reagan's science adviser, George A. Keyworth II, in a small ceremony at NSF on 4 September, though his presence at the agency has been keenly felt for months. Since June, Bloch has been making the rounds of NSF directorates, where he has received, say sources at the agency, "dog and pony shows" that left him dissatisfied with some operations and programs. For starters, Bloch told science writers on 6 September, he found NSF's current spending of 10% of its $1.5 billion budget on engineering to be "less than adequate—giving rise to rumors that he will cut some science programs to upgrade engineering in fiscal 1986. "It will definitely be his budget," says Knapp of Bloch's activities. "He's an engineer with lots of experience with tight corporate budgets, so, of course, he will bring all that to bear at NSF." —IG

# Pentagon names chief Star Wars scientist

Since April, when James Abrahamson, an Air Force lieutenant general then in charge of the space shuttle program at NASA, was named to head the Strategic Defense Initiative, the Pentagon has been seeking a chief scientist for the program that President Reagan announced to most everyone's surprise a year earlier as an "effort which holds the promise of changing the course of human history." The search ended in August with the appointment of Gerold Yonas, a physicist who has directed pulsed energy sciences at Sandia Labs since 1972. Yonas, a graduate of Cornell, with an engineering PhD from Caltech, ran three R&D projects at Sandia—particle-beam fusion, simulation of nuclear weapons effects and technologies relevant to directed-energy weapons—that are central to SDI.

On leave from Sandia for two years to work at the Pentagon, Yonas describes his new job as double-barreled: "Internally, I will review all current work, advising from a scientific perspective on the emphasis of continuing projects and on new directions. The other part is to run an outreach program to encourage contributions from the scientific community." Actually, the outreach effort will be in the hands of James A. Ionson, on leave from NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, where he is an astrophysicist. Ionson also is an adjunct professor at the University of Maryland, and will continue to teach while at SDI.

As Yonas sees it, "I'm looking to academia for creative ideas, though I recognize that innovations can come from everywhere—from a lone grad student, a one-man company or a research lab with thousands. We're pretty sure the underlying work will be unclassified. We really have to pull young people into the program because they will inherit it if we decide to go ahead."

Yonas admits he views the SDI missile-defense system in space, which critics immediately dubbed as "Star Wars," with "healthy skepticism and a great deal of scientific curiosity." He says, "I have some troubles with aspects of SDI that I can't yet quantify. But I certainly can't accept as inevitable that we will be living under a threat that nations can lob nuclear missiles at each other forever. It's in the interest of all people that we find some defense against that kind of warfare." —IG

YONAS