

they'll help when it comes time to look for a job. It favors limiting cumulative postdoctoral appointments to about five years. Besides that, however, the report's recommendations to advisers and institutions are broad: Spell out what's expected of a postdoc, and provide grievance procedures, career

counseling, and other benefits. Says Dresselhaus, "It may be necessary for the funding agencies to require coverage of the basic needs of postdocs, such as medical insurance. That may mean that fewer postdocs can be funded. There are real changes implied by this report."

TONI FEDER

Saying "No" to Top Government Jobs

Later this month, phones will start ringing in offices of corporations, universities, and private organizations across the country as the transition team for the new president begins its effort to lure scores of science and technology experts into government service. And while those receiving the calls may be tempted by the opportunity to become an undersecretary, a commissioner, or even a director in some powerful federal agency, many will say, "No."

The reason, according to a new report by the National Academies, is that "an increasingly complex web of restrictions makes it difficult for appointees to enter government service and then resume their careers after government service." The report, a brief document designed for quick digestion by government headhunters, is the latest in a string of studies by various groups published during the past 12 years recommending that the process of presidential appointment and Senate confirmation be made less burdensome to prospective jobholders.

The report, *Science and Technology in the National Interest: The Presidential Appointment Process*, was put together by a panel of former government science and technology officeholders under the direction of Mary Lowe Good, a former undersecretary for technology at the Department of Commerce. It focuses on about 80 senior science and technology positions in the government that require presidential appointment and Senate confirmation—everything from the president's science adviser to the head of NASA, to the administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration.

The report recommends that the new administration move quickly to get appointees in place, particularly the president's science adviser. Once in place, the science adviser should help fill what the report identifies as "the 50 most urgent science and technology presidential appointments."

Filling those positions is problematic, however, because the approval process is notoriously slow, intrusive,

and unpleasant for candidates. "A term in Washington for scientists and engineers often means two steps backward for every step forward along a career path," says panel member John McTague, a retired Ford Motor Co executive who served as acting director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy under President Reagan. McTague says scientists who join the government "may lose touch with the cutting edge of their field and find themselves in an irreversible career shift toward management."

The approval process for a candidate includes filling out lengthy forms and opening up one's life—both public and private—to intense FBI and IRS scrutiny. Candidates must also meet increasingly restrictive ethical standards that can require them to forgo pension benefits, sell stocks and options, and sever ties with the industries from which they come. "Sensible standards are clearly necessary to prevent conflicts of interest, but the number and complexity of employment restrictions have risen to a point where they deter potential candidates," McTague says.

There are difficulties in all sectors, but industry is particularly affected. The report notes that during the Reagan and Bush years, 25% of the science and technology appointees were from industry, compared to only 12% under Clinton. The decline is due to ever-tightening restrictions, not to which political party holds the White House. The full report, as well as background documents, can be found on the Web at <http://www.national-academies.org/presidentialappointments>.

Until reforms take place, people who receive job offers from the next president might want to pick up *The Survivor's Guide for Presidential Nominees*, a book being published by the Brookings Institution's Presidential Appointee Initiative. The guide will be available on the Web on 15 November at <http://www.appointee.brookings.org>.

JIM DAWSON

Soleil Rises: French Synchrotron Gets Go-Ahead

France's science community is reveling in the decision to build a synchrotron light source on French soil, announced on 11 September by research minister Roger-Gérard Schwartzberg after years of flip-flopping by changing governments and steadfast lobbying by scientists. Schwartzberg chose the Paris suburb of Ile de France from among nearly a dozen competing regions as the site for the new synchrotron, Soleil (French for "sun").

When he became research minister this past March, Schwartzberg hinted that he would revisit building Soleil, which his ousted predecessor, Claude Allègre, had canceled in favor of joining the UK synchrotron Diamond (see PHYSICS TODAY, January, page 50, and May, page 53). In July, Schwartzberg said he was "95% certain" to approve Soleil, and the focus shifted to where it would go.

Expecting Soleil's presence to boost the local economy, several regions offered to pay the Fr 1.2 billion (about \$160 million) construction cost if they got to host the synchrotron. Ile de France, home to the country's existing synchrotron, the Laboratoire pour l'Utilisation du Rayonnement Electromagnétique (LURE), won out because of nearby academic and industrial labs, particularly in genome research, and because of its accessibility to scientists. The runner-up was Lille, in northern France, which has no major scientific facilities. "People at LURE are extremely happy that it will be built, and built nearby," says the synchrotron's director, Robert Comes. "Even if one wants to decentralize France, that doesn't



SUPPORTERS CELEBRATE the decision to build a third-generation synchrotron, Soleil, near Paris.