

Orbach Gets Undersecretary of Science Nod

Physicist Raymond Orbach, the director of the US Department of Energy's Office of Science, was nominated by President Bush in December to become DOE's first Undersecretary for Science. The position, created last August as part of the Energy Policy Act of 2005, elevates Orbach to the same level as the existing undersecretaries for defense, and for energy and the environment.

Orbach must be confirmed by the Senate and could not comment on his pending promotion, but Mildred Dresselhaus, Orbach's predecessor at the Office of Science, said giving Orbach more power should be good for science. "I think an undersecretary has a better chance of solving problems and getting things done," she said. "In physics research positions it doesn't make a whole lot of difference who a person is because it is the ideas that prevail."

But in government, rank is important, she said. "When I was in that position [Office of Science director], being of the same status as the other assistant secretaries and below the undersecretaries made it difficult to work with them."

The science community has been pushing for the establishment of an undersecretary for science since at least 2000, and in 2003 a review panel, led by then-MIT president Charles Vest, recommended elevating the sci-

ence director to undersecretary level to serve as a high-level science advocate within DOE. The department provides about 40% of all federal funding of physical sciences in the US, with physics research receiving about 60% of its funding from DOE. **Jim Dawson**

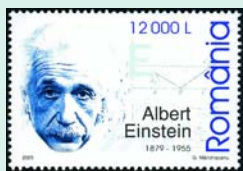
News Notes

LANL has new boss. US Department of Energy officials have chosen a consortium to take over management of Los Alamos National Laboratory in June. The group, called Los Alamos National Security LLC, consists of the University of California, Bechtel, BWX Technologies, and Washington Group International. Michael Anastasio, currently the director of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, will be the lab's new director.

For the past 60 years UC has run the lab, but the management contract was put out for bid last year (see PHYSICS TODAY, March 2005, page 26, and June 2005, page 29). Bechtel will take over the lab's day-to-day management, and UC will run the science programs. The seven-year contract is worth up to \$548 million. All the employees will be moved out of the UC retirement-benefit plan into a private plan. Many observers believed that a joint bid by defense contractor Lockheed Martin and the University of Texas would win the contract, says Douglas Roberts, a former lab employee. Lockheed Martin officials are considering whether to protest the contract award. **PKG ■**

WEB WATCH

<http://fizjlk.fic.uni.lodz.pl/RUT/Stamps/wyp/wyp2005.html>



Besides studying phase transitions on solid surfaces, Jerzy Rutkowski of the University of Lodz in Poland collects physics-related stamps. By Rutkowski's reckoning, more than 2000 such stamps have been issued worldwide since 1847, the year Benjamin Franklin appeared on the first US stamp. To see Rutkowski's latest collection, visit **World Year of Physics 2005 in Philately**.

<http://wtc.nist.gov>

To better understand why and how the towers of the World Trade Center collapsed on 11 September 2001, NIST undertook a three-year building and fire safety investigation. Results are available at the website **NIST and the World Trade Center**.



<http://earthquake.usgs.gov>

The aim of the **Earthquake Hazards Program** of the US Geological Survey is to reduce earthquake damage. To fulfill that aim, EHP monitors earthquake activity and displays the results in real-time maps, which you can find on the EHP website.

To suggest topics or sites for Web Watch, please visit <http://www.physicstoday.org/suggestwebwatch.html>.

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