The Czech Republic will pay around €1.2 million a year plus about €10 million, and Austria's dues will be about €2.5 million a year plus €20 million, according to sources in those countries. Astronomers in Austria recently won their government's support after trying for many years to join ESO.

For astronomers in all three countries, joining ESO means gaining access to the Very Large Telescope in Chile and to the planning process for the ELT and other future facilities. Says the University of Innsbruck's Sabine Schindler, president of Austria's society for astronomy and astrophysics, "It's not just about access to telescopes. It's also about politics and being part of the international community." **TF**

NASA lacks money for science. Facing pressure to implement President Bush's 2004 directive to send manned spacecraft to the Moon and, eventually, to Mars, NASA administrator Michael Griffin has finally said straight out what space scientists have been claiming for months: The space agency will have to cut science programs to support the development of manned missions. The short-term goals of NASA's manned space program include completion of the International Space Station and development of a new crew exploration vehicle to replace the aging space shuttle fleet. Those projects set the stage for a more ambitious program to return to the Moon.


NASA

Griffin

In testimony before the Senate in late April, Griffin said, "I believe that fulfilling our commitments on the [space station] and bringing the crew exploration vehicle on line in a timely manner, not later than 2014 and possibly sooner, is a higher priority than these science missions."

Soon after Griffin testified, the National Research Council issued a report that stated, "NASA does not have the resources necessary to maintain a vigorous science program." The committee that wrote the report concluded that NASA's plans for the next five years for research in astrophysics, heliophysics, planetary science, astrobiology, Earth science, and several other programs are "not sustainable" and are "not properly balanced to support a healthy mix of small, moderate-sized, and large missions." Griffin has asked a NASA committee to meet with scientists and get a list of science mission priorities, but he cautioned that no more money can be spent on science. **JLD**

Iraqi virtual library operating. Some 800 students and scientists at seven Iraqi universities now have access to more than 17 000 science, engineering, and computer science journals, thanks to the recent startup of the Iraqi Virtual Science Library. The library, an idea first put forward 16 months ago by several scientists working as federal government fellows for the American Association for the Advancement of Science, is intended to reconnect Iraq's scientific and university communities to the rest of the world after decades of neglect, said physicist Barrett Ripin, a senior science diplomacy officer at the US Department of State (see PHYSICS TODAY, November 2005, page 24). "Iraq began with nothing," Ripin said in a press conference announcing that the library had gone online. "Not only were there decades of very limited access to journals [under Saddam Hussein], but what the scientists did have was destroyed in the war, so they are starting from scratch."

Several publishers, including the American Institute of Physics, are providing access to their scientific journals at highly discounted rates or for free. Sun Microsystems has donated several servers and technical help to get the library connected and operational. The initial costs of the project are being paid with $460 000 in funding from the US Department of Defense. In addition to journal articles, the library includes training classes, links to many US government research agencies, and e-mail links to scientists outside Iraq. **JLD**

Louisiana physics institute. In a state that is still recovering from the battering last year by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the formation of the new Horace Hearne Jr Institute for Theoretical Physics at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge takes on special meaning. "It's encouraging that things are moving ahead at LSU," says institute co-director Jorge Pullin. LSU was relatively unharmed by the hurricanes, he says, but the state as a whole suffered, and the university's budget was cut by 5%.

Research at the institute focuses on gravitational physics and quantum technologies such as quantum computing and quantum optics. Some 14 faculty researchers belong to the institute; 4 are in new positions. "The institute brings a new level of international activity and prominence to LSU physics," says Pullin. Among other activities, the institute will host seminars and conferences and will foster international collaborations.

Hearne, an LSU alumnus with a bachelor's degree in physics, willed nearly $1.3 million for the establishment of the institute that bears his name. The state provided an additional $800 000. **TF** ■

web watch

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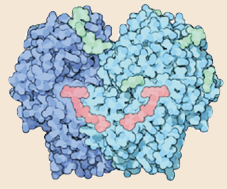

Two physics graduate students, André Brown and Philip Johnson, run **BioCurious**, a blog devoted to biology and its relationship with physics. Their inaugural post, "What Is Systems Biology?" appeared in February 2005. Since then, Brown and Johnson have ranged over such topics as open access publishing, atomic force microscopy, and the potential pitfalls of naming one's own yeast strain.

http://www.droidlogic.com

Walking is easy for humans but hard for robots. On his website **Droid Logic**, computer scientist Eric Vaughan describes and illustrates his research into evolving circuitry and grid computing to develop walking machines.

http://www.npl.co.uk/thelearningroom

The UK's National Physical Laboratory conducts research into measurement standards. Like NIST, its US equivalent, NPL also supports physics education. NPL's **Learning Room** features experiments, tutorials, and other resources for physics teachers and their students.