

gram's top official. Edward Sproat, director of DOE's Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management, told congressional appropriators in April that funding shortfalls will prevent the department from meeting its March 2017 target for opening the Nevada repository. But Sproat assured lawmakers that DOE will proceed with the licensing process before the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, a process that is expected to take three to four years to complete.

Sproat has not yet provided a revised timetable of when Yucca Mountain can begin to accept high-level radioactive waste and spent nuclear fuel now held at 121 sites around the nation. But he said that each year the project is delayed beyond 2017 is expected to increase the total cost by \$500 million. About \$9 billion has been spent already for geological and environmental studies at the site, but the project remains mired in political opposition. Congress selected the Yucca Mountain site for the repository in 1987 and established the Nuclear Waste Fund to finance it. The fund, which currently holds about \$21 billion, comes from an assessment on the electricity generated by nuclear plants. DK

Austria to join ESO. After 30 years of prodding from its astronomy community, Austria made a formal bid in April for membership in the European Southern Observatory. "Last autumn felt like the final phase of frustration," says University of Vienna astronomer Franz Kerschbaum, who has been campaigning for ESO membership since he was a student in the 1980s. But each new science minister brought new priorities and kept presenting the astronomers with "new homework," Kerschbaum adds. "So we were really surprised with the move by the ministry this spring," ESO council members are expected to confirm Austria this month as ESO's 14th member state beginning 1 July.

Austria's share of ESO's roughly €160 million (\$249 million) annual budget will be about €3 million per year. Membership in ESO will gain Austrian scientists access to the 8.2-m Very Large Telescope in Chile and participation in the design of the 42-m Extremely Large Telescope. The country's high-tech sector will also benefit from the opportunity to develop the advanced optics, detectors, and lightweight materials needed for astronomical instrumentation. JNAM

History-making gift to AIP. A Colorado-based private foundation is giving the American Institute of Physics \$3 mil-

lion to endow the directorship of AIP's Center for History of Physics. It is the largest gift ever given to AIP (which publishes PHYSICS TODAY).

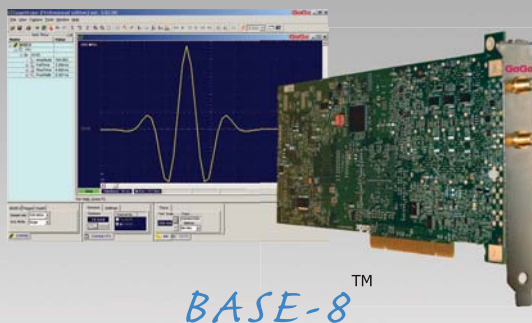
The gift comes from the Avenir Foundation, which supports education and the arts, and honors Spencer Weart, for whom the directorship will be named. During his 35 years at the helm of the history center, Weart oversaw the transition from card files to computer databases, the creation of a popular online exhibit hall, and the growth of the center's endowment to \$13 million. He also wrote five books. Weart was further rec-

ognized on 9 May with a symposium, sponsored by AIP and the University of Maryland's department of history, at which many luminaries were present (see photos at <http://www.aip.org/history/symposium.html>). Weart announced last year that he will retire once a successor is found.

Says AIP executive director and CEO H. Frederick Dylla, "The Center for History of Physics is a unique resource for scholars and institutions worldwide. . . . This endowment will ensure the center's stature and growth into the foreseeable future." TF ■

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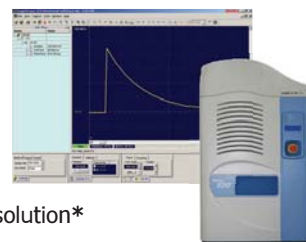
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