

## FYI SCIENCE POLICY BRIEFS

### Congress plans to update small business R&D programs

Two federal programs that provide technology maturation grants to small businesses are set to expire at the end of the fiscal year on 30 September. The Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) programs together allocate around \$5 billion annually and are broadly popular, but they have been authorized for only a few years at a time; Congress has had to repeatedly extend them. Lawmakers have begun discussing potential reforms, including expanding research security measures and prioritizing funding for new applicants.

Protecting small business R&D from foreign exploitation, particularly by the Chinese government, was a central theme in a hearing held by the House Small Business Committee in late February. Shortly before the hearing took place, Republican lawmakers sent letters

to the 11 federal agencies that administer SBIR and STTR grants to request that they examine the programs' potential vulnerabilities.

The Senate Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee also discussed potential reforms to the programs during a hearing in early March. Committee Chair Joni Ernst (R-IA) has proposed legislation that would give the programs the ability to claw back funds from businesses that expose intellectual property to adversaries. The legislation would also set aside a large fraction of the SBIR budget for awards to new applicants, among other measures designed to reduce funding for companies that continually receive awards. —LM

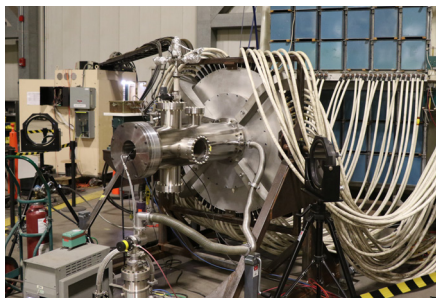
### Staffing losses roil federal science agencies

Since President Trump took office in January, federal science agencies are down thousands of employees due to a

combination of layoffs of probationary employees, deferred resignation offers, and reductions in force (RIFs). Some of the probationary employee layoffs have been challenged in court, and some have been reversed, but the same employees may ultimately be subject to RIFs, which are less open to legal challenges.

The exact size of the staffing cutbacks at science agencies remains unclear. As *PHYSICS TODAY* went to press in mid-March, the losses included more than 2500 people at the Department of Energy, NOAA, and the National Institutes of Health. NSF fired more than 80 probationary employees but was in the process of rehiring most of them, and NIST fired around 70 probationary employees. —LM **PT**

*FYI* (<https://aip.org/fyi>), the science policy news service of the American Institute of Physics, focuses on the intersection of policy and the physical sciences.



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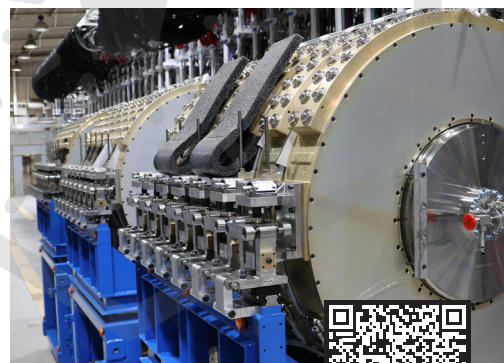
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