taxpayer-funded inventions if NIH granted the petition. “It’s a misapplication of the statute … [that] would likely have serious unintended and adverse consequences,” said AAU representative Theodore Poehler, vice provost for research at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. “It would be a major deterrent to licensing inventions … if potential licensees believe the government has authority” to control prices, added COGR representative Andrew Neighbour, a law professor at the University of California, Los Angeles.

NIH officials gave little hint after the hearing of how they will rule. Mark Rohrbaugh, head of the agency’s technology-transfer office, said he plans to “move expeditiously” to make a recommendation to NIH Director Elias Zerhouni, who will make the final decision. Although many legal observers predict that NIH will reject the petition, Love is hoping for a boost from election-year politics. “Drug pricing is a big political issue” that President George W. Bush won’t want to hand to his opponent, he says. Love has also asked NIH to exercise march-in rights on another drug, Pfizer’s Xalatan glaucoma treatment, which he says costs up to five times more in the United States than abroad.

—DAVID MALAKOFF

DEVELOPMENT SPENDING

Economists Rate Greenhouse Gas Curbs a Poor Investment

COPENHAGEN—Feel like throwing your tax money away? Invest in measures to rein in global warming. That’s the controversial conclusion, at least, of a workshop here last week that brought together a varied group of economists, including three Nobel laureates, to analyze spending on global problems.

Participants of the “Copenhagen Consensus” weren’t purely naysayers: They lauded, as money well spent, initiatives proposed to combat AIDS, malaria, and malnutrition, for example. “This will help us focus on the more important problems,” says workshop organizer Bjørn Lomborg, director of the Environmental Assessment Institute in Copenhagen.

Many scientists don’t buy that argument, however. “We shouldn’t be spending less on climate change so we can spend more on sanitation. The problems are interrelated,” says Stephen Schneider, a climatologist at Stanford University, who labels the workshop’s premise “phony and a distortion.”

The stated premise was that the industrialized world has limited funds—about $50 billion a year—for aid to developing countries and no objective way to set priorities. According to Lomborg, author of The Skeptical Environmentalist—a 2001 book of which Lomborg invited other economists, who declined to participate in the workshop’s organization was “unbiased.”

He acknowledges, though, that the panel was short on environmental expertise. “I invited other economists,” he says. “One can’t help suspecting … that Lomborg has stacked both the participants list and the framing of the questions to achieve this result.”

Laying out the case for climate change was William Cline, an environmental economist at the Center for Global Development in Washington, D.C. His primary evidence was the 2001 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which predicts an increase in average global temperatures of between 1.4° and 5.8°C by the year 2100. Lomborg acknowledged that the report is “the best of our knowledge on climate change.”

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The economic benefits of stemming global warming include protecting the lives of income-generating human beings as well as arable land. Steps to limit warming center on reducing emissions of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, a tenet of the Kyoto Protocol. The most cost-effective strategy, Cline argued, would be a global carbon tax, more aggressive than the one called for under Kyoto, that would halve greenhouse emissions by the end of the century.

The panel rejected that line of argument, concluding that Cline’s proposals would be “very bad” investments. Panelist Nancy Stueby, an economist at the University of Chicago, explains that the solutions would require “large expenditures for benefits that would come far in the future.” Even with a less limited budget, the Kyoto Protocol, in the panel’s view, is not worthwhile.

That leaves scientists such as Schneider, a lead author of the IPCC report, fuming.

—JOHN BOHANNON

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