

## Frontier's End?

In the opening address for the National Research Council conference on "Sources of international friction and cooperation in high technology and trade" (May 30), Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-New Mexico) referred to the drastic proposed cuts in federal support for civilian research and development as "the place where the Republican budgets will do the most damage to our nation's future well-being and prosperity." He indicated spending will be cut 30-40% by 2002 to a four-decade low as a percentage of our economy.

"What has the research community done, or failed to do, to deserve such treatment at this stage in our history?," he asked. "They won the Cold War, put men on the moon, revolutionized medicine, invented computers, pioneered electronics and semiconductor devices and invented a myriad of new materials that have fundamentally changed our lives."

Bingaman continued, "Federal investment in civilian research and development did not cause our federal deficit. Quite the opposite . . . these investments have paid for themselves many times over by the growth they contribute to our economy." Further, "The governments of our major economic rivals, Japan and Germany, recognize the importance of civilian research investments . . . Neither country shows any sign that it will join us in slashing its research spending."

Bingaman recounted how "almost a century ago, in 1899, the head of the Patent Office, Charles Duell, proposed to close up shop because 'everything that can be invented has been invented'."

He concluded, "Because I believe the scientific and technological frontier is still endless, because I do not want to risk condemning our children and grandchildren to a less prosperous, less healthy and less secure future, I for one intend to continue to fight for federal research investments . . . before the damage is irreversible." n