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(54) **SUBSTRATE SUPPORT PROVIDING GAP HEIGHT AND PLANARIZATION ADJUSTMENT IN PLASMA PROCESSING CHAMBER**

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See application file for complete search history.

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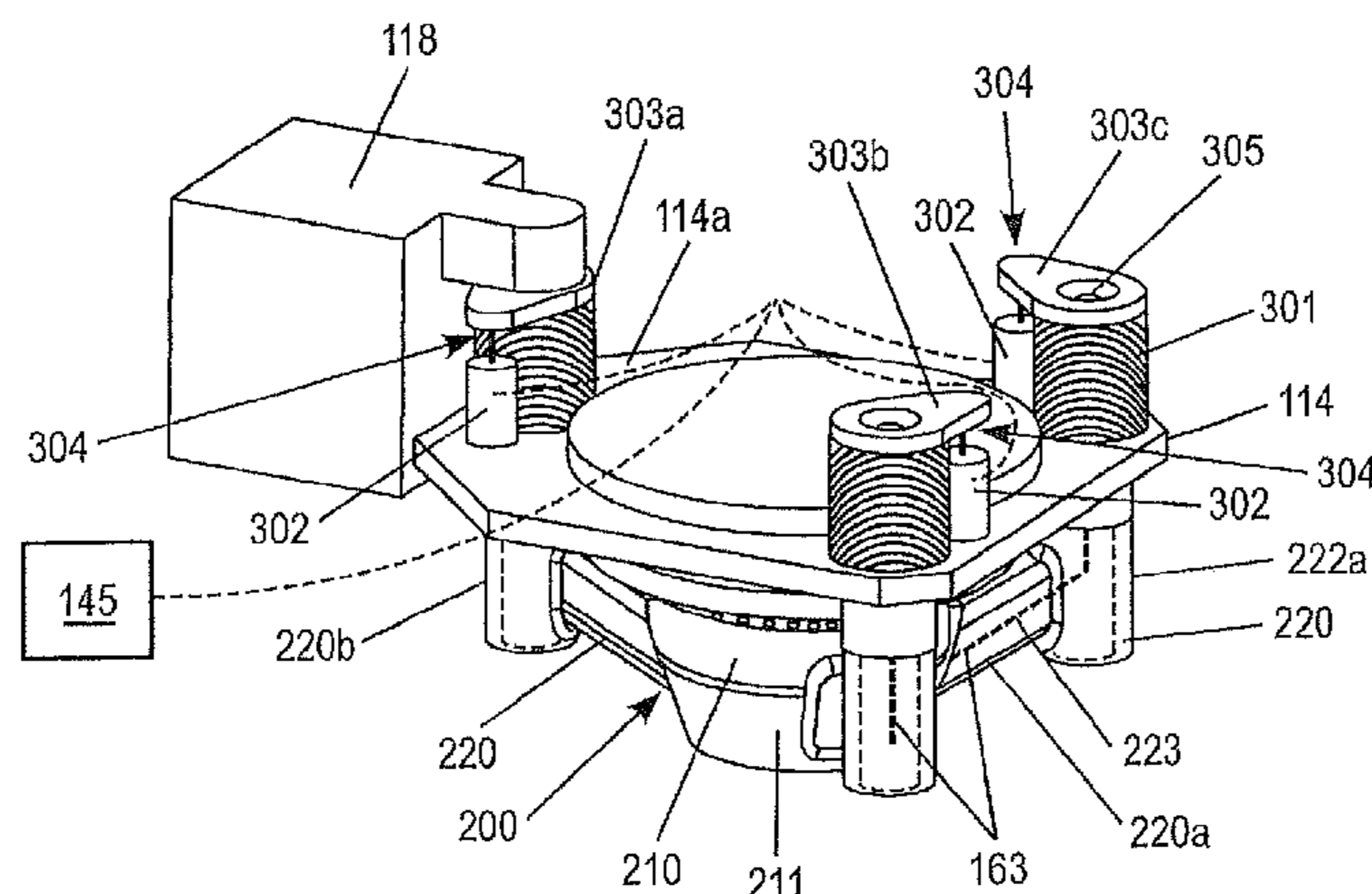
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Primary Examiner — Terrence R Till

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A semiconductor substrate support for use in a plasma processing apparatus comprises a chuck body having a plenum and three radially extending bores extending between the plenum and an outer periphery of the chuck body, wherein the chuck body is sized to support a semiconductor substrate having a diameter of at least 450 mm. The semiconductor substrate support further comprises three tubular support arms which include a first section extending radially outward from the outer periphery of the chuck body, and a second section extending vertically from the first section. The tubular support arms provide a passage therethrough which communicates with a respective bore in the chuck body. The second section of each tubular support arm is configured to engage with a respective actuation mechanism outside the chamber operable to effect vertical translation and planarization of the chuck body in the interior of a plasma processing chamber.

71 Claims, 9 Drawing Sheets



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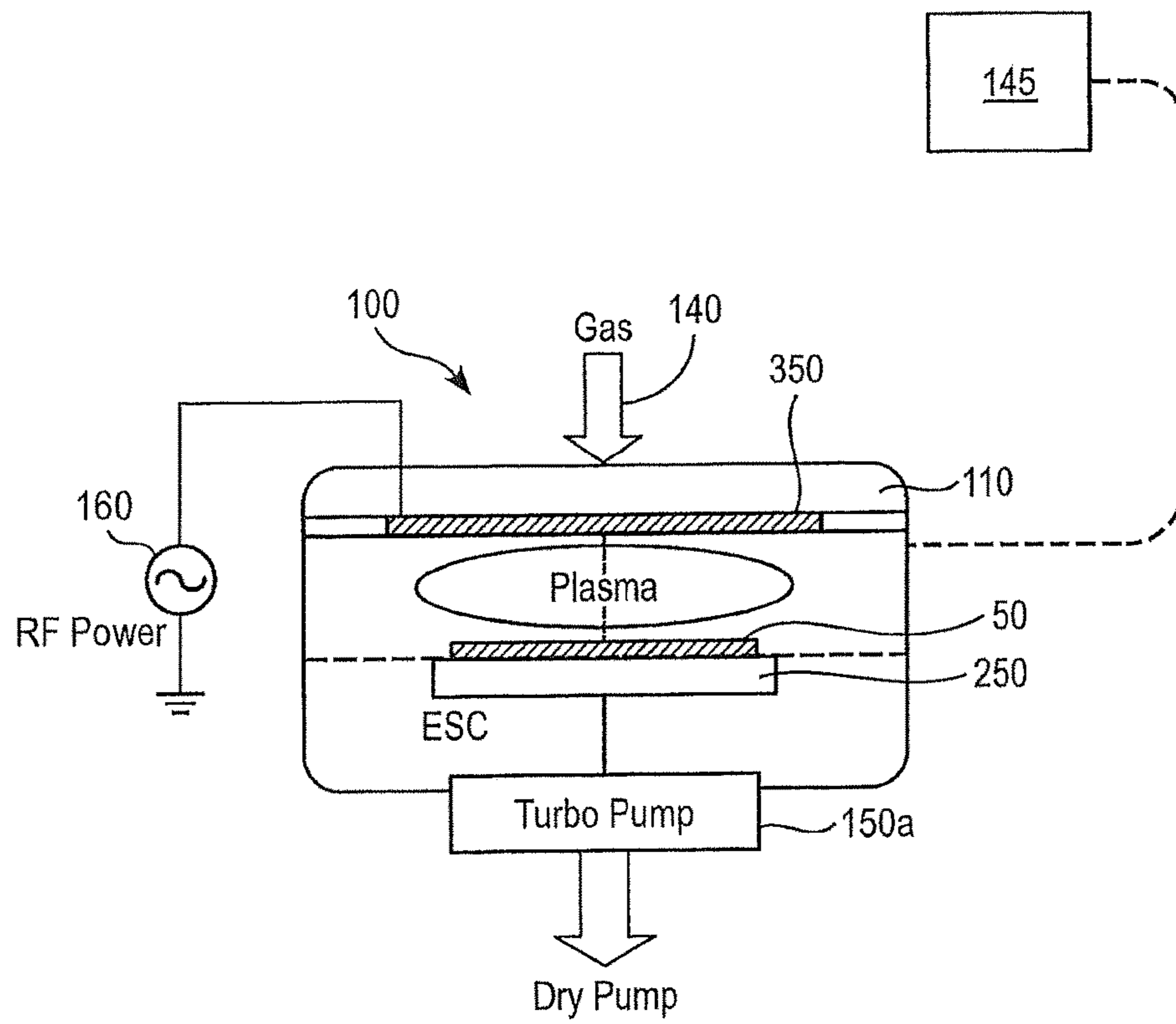
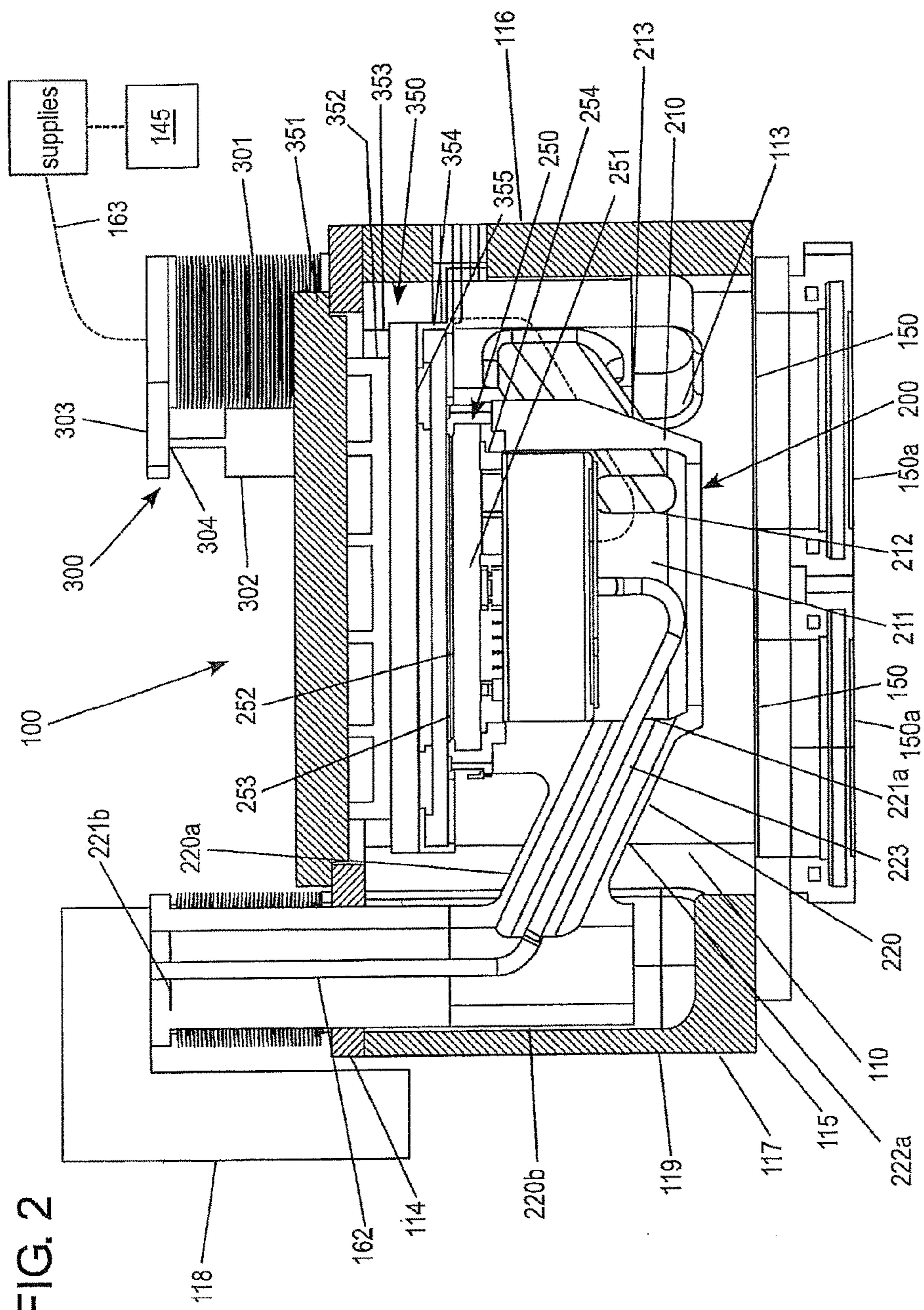


FIG. 1



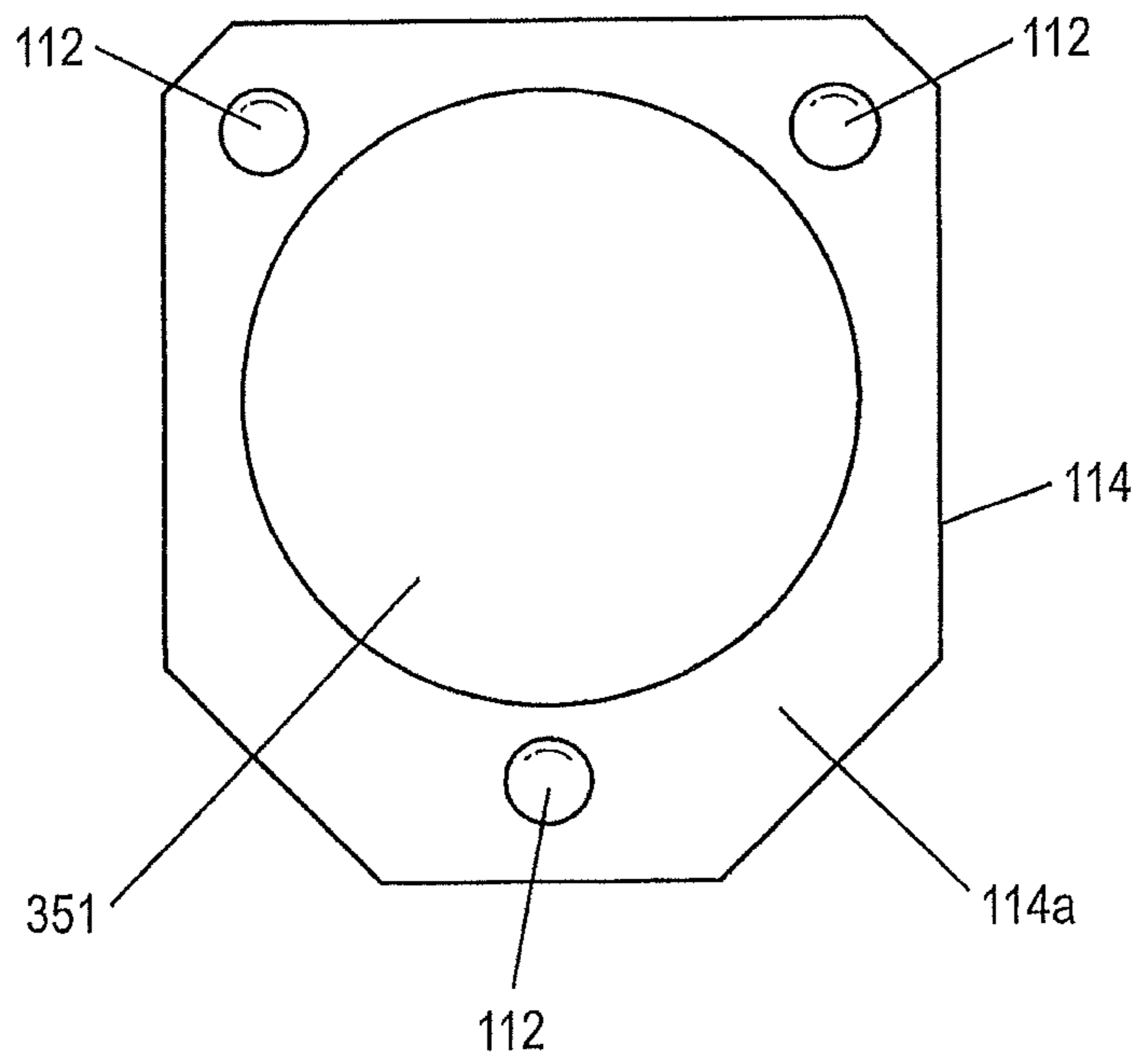


FIG. 3

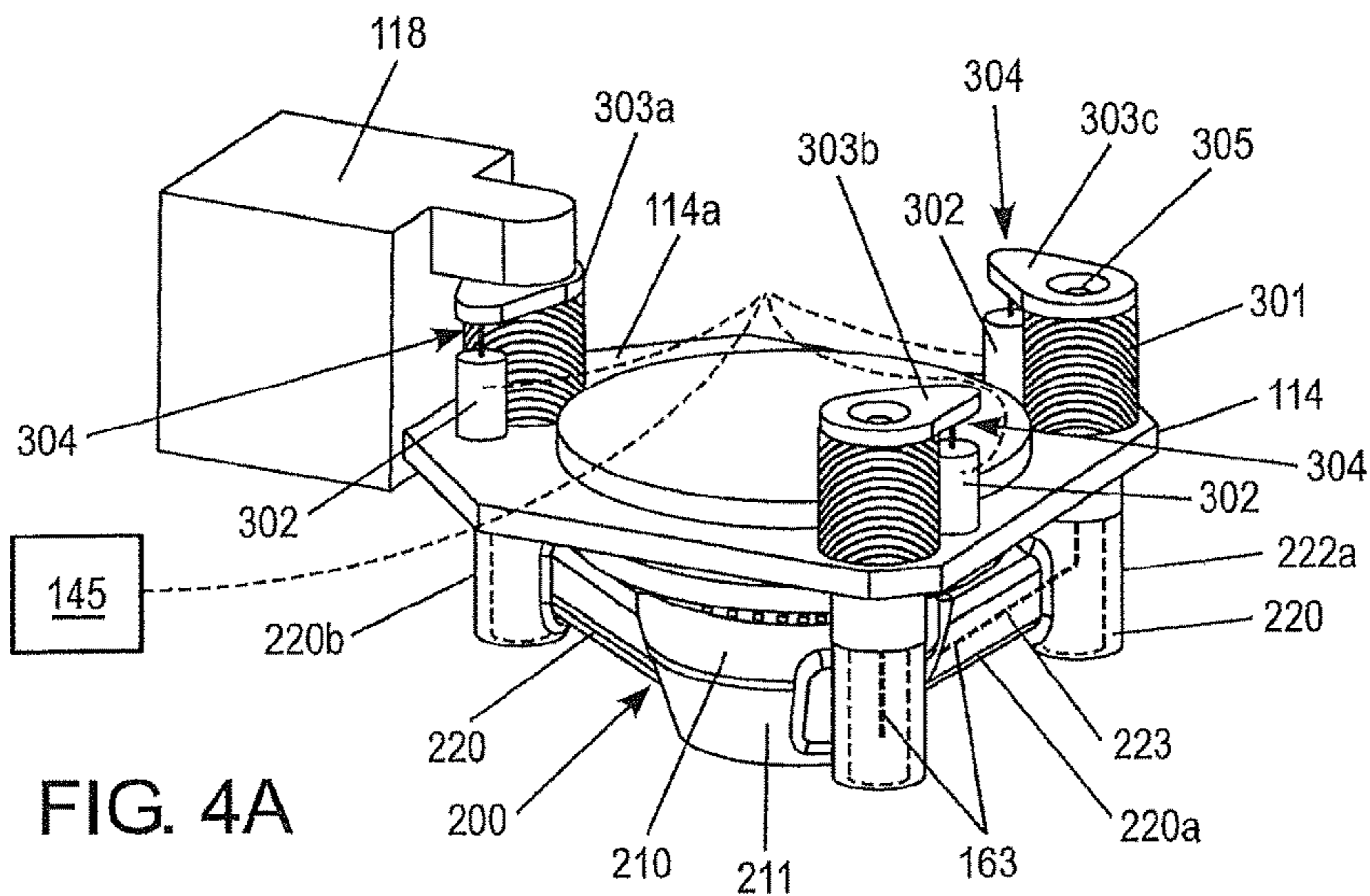


FIG. 4A

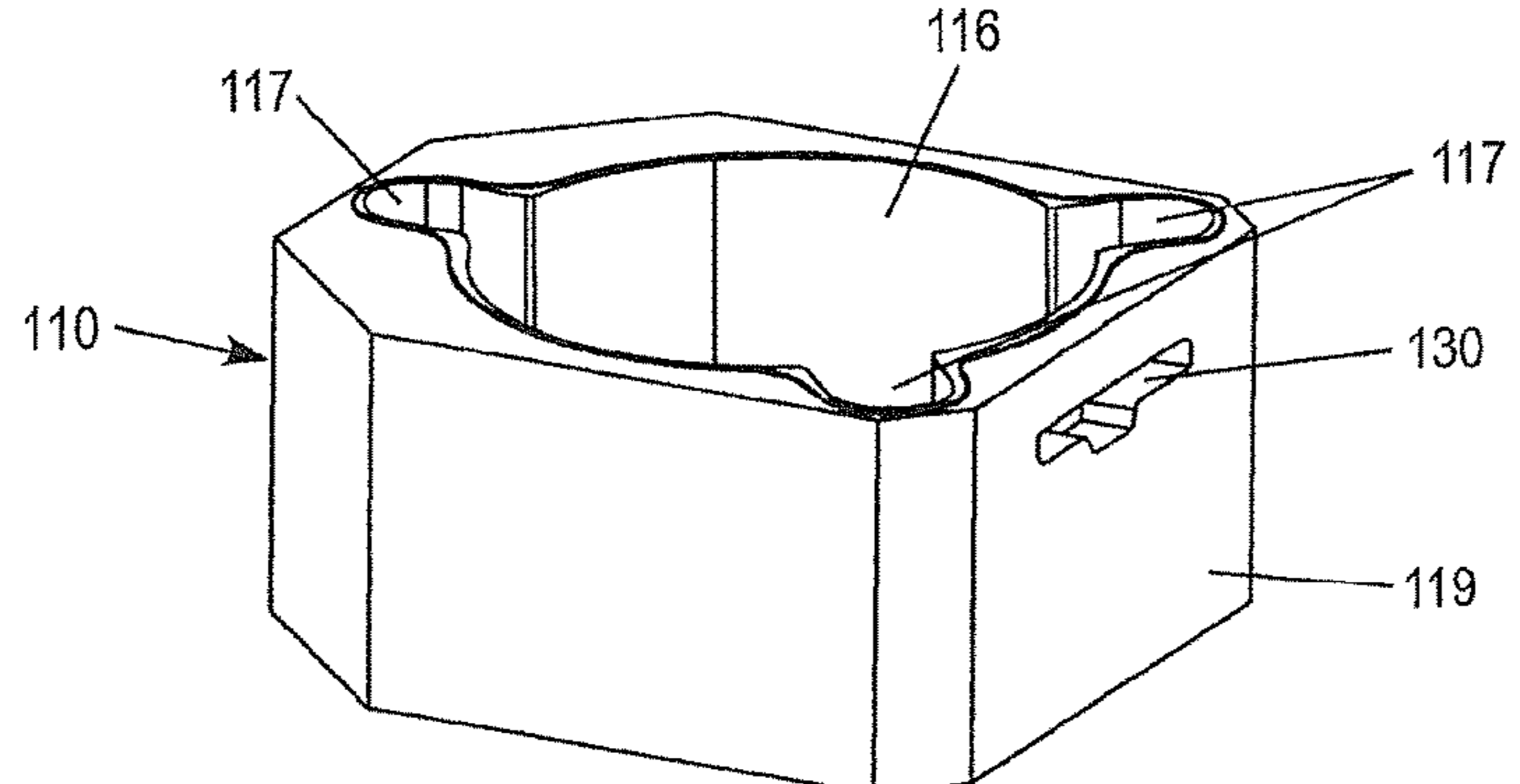


FIG. 4B

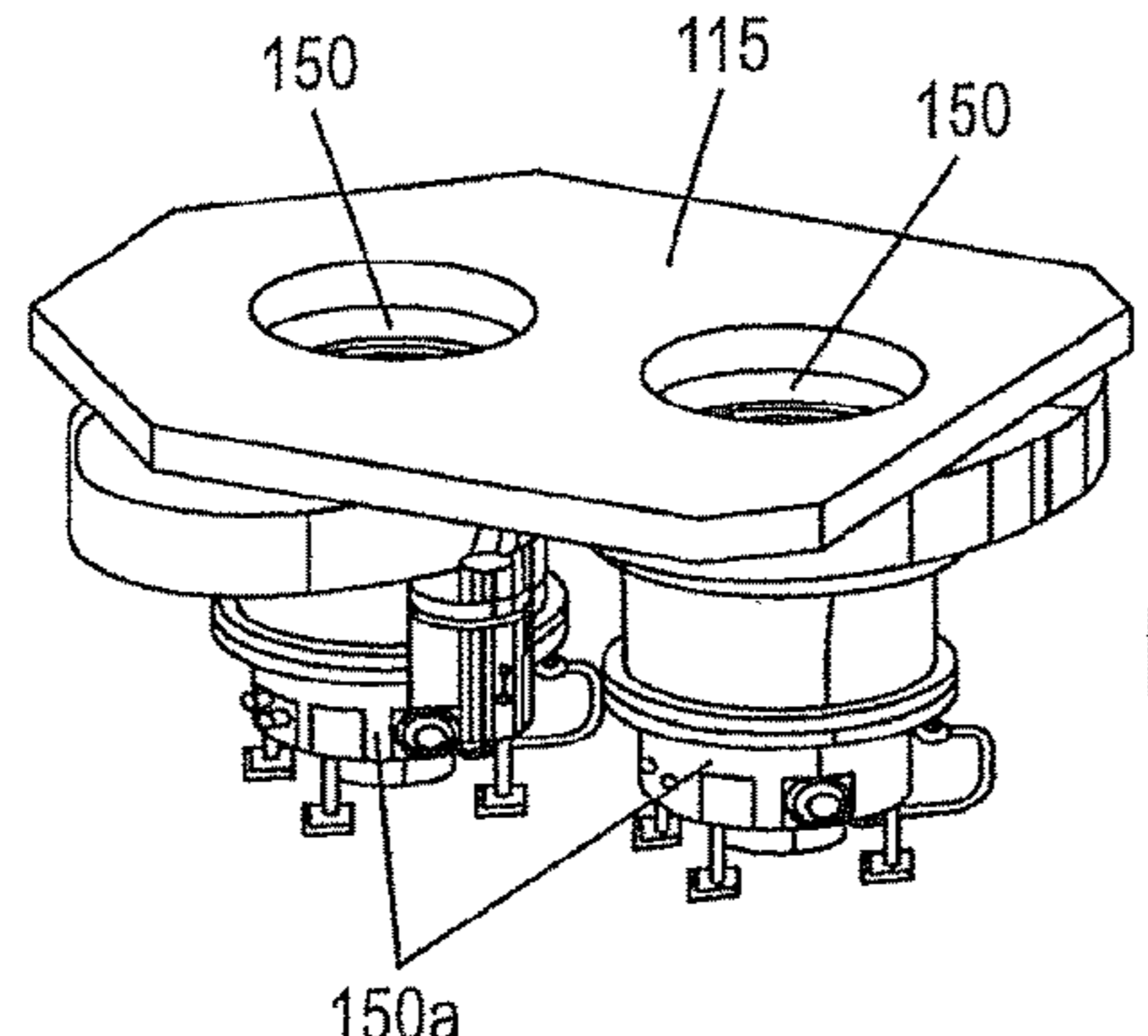


FIG. 4C

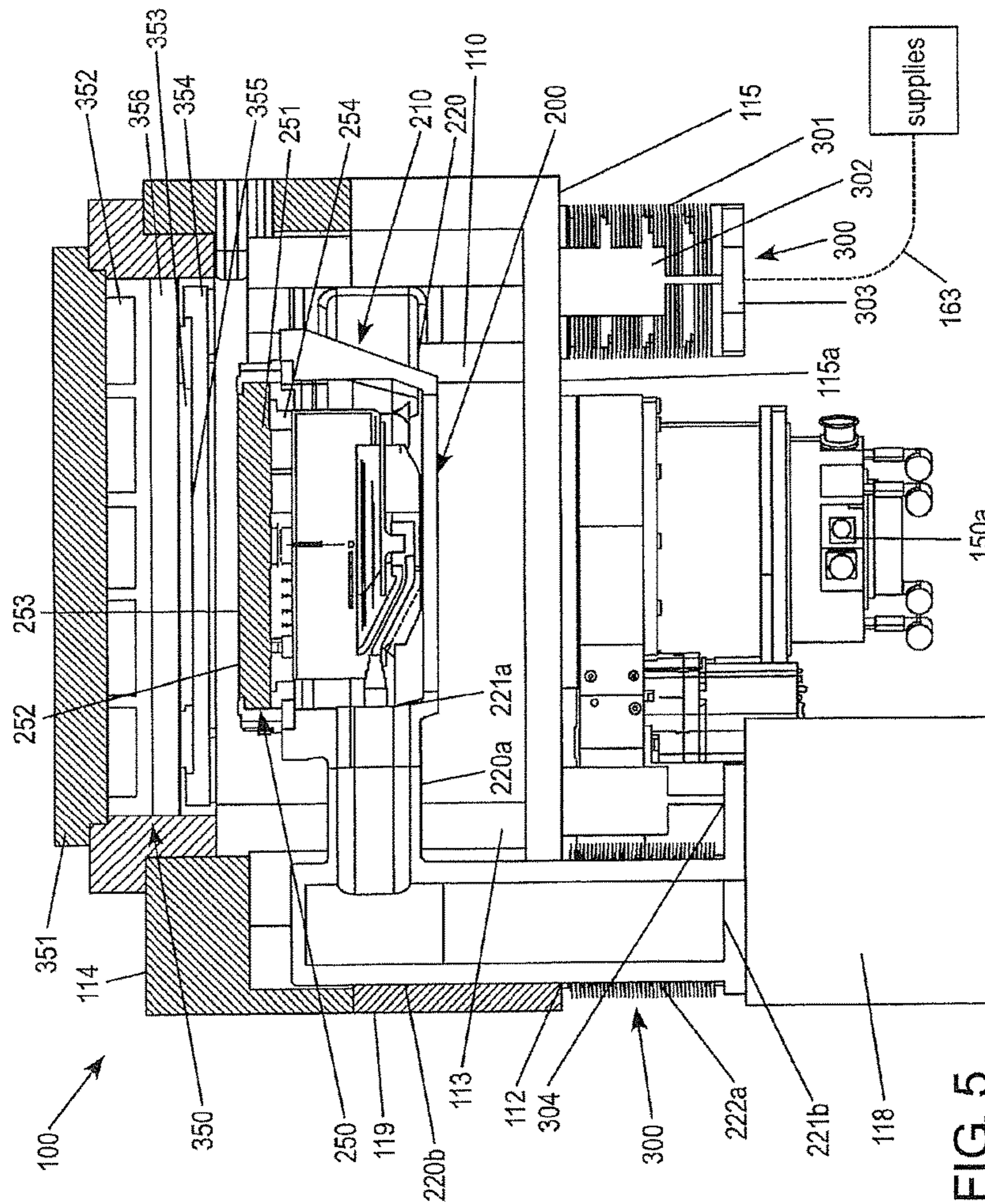


FIG. 5

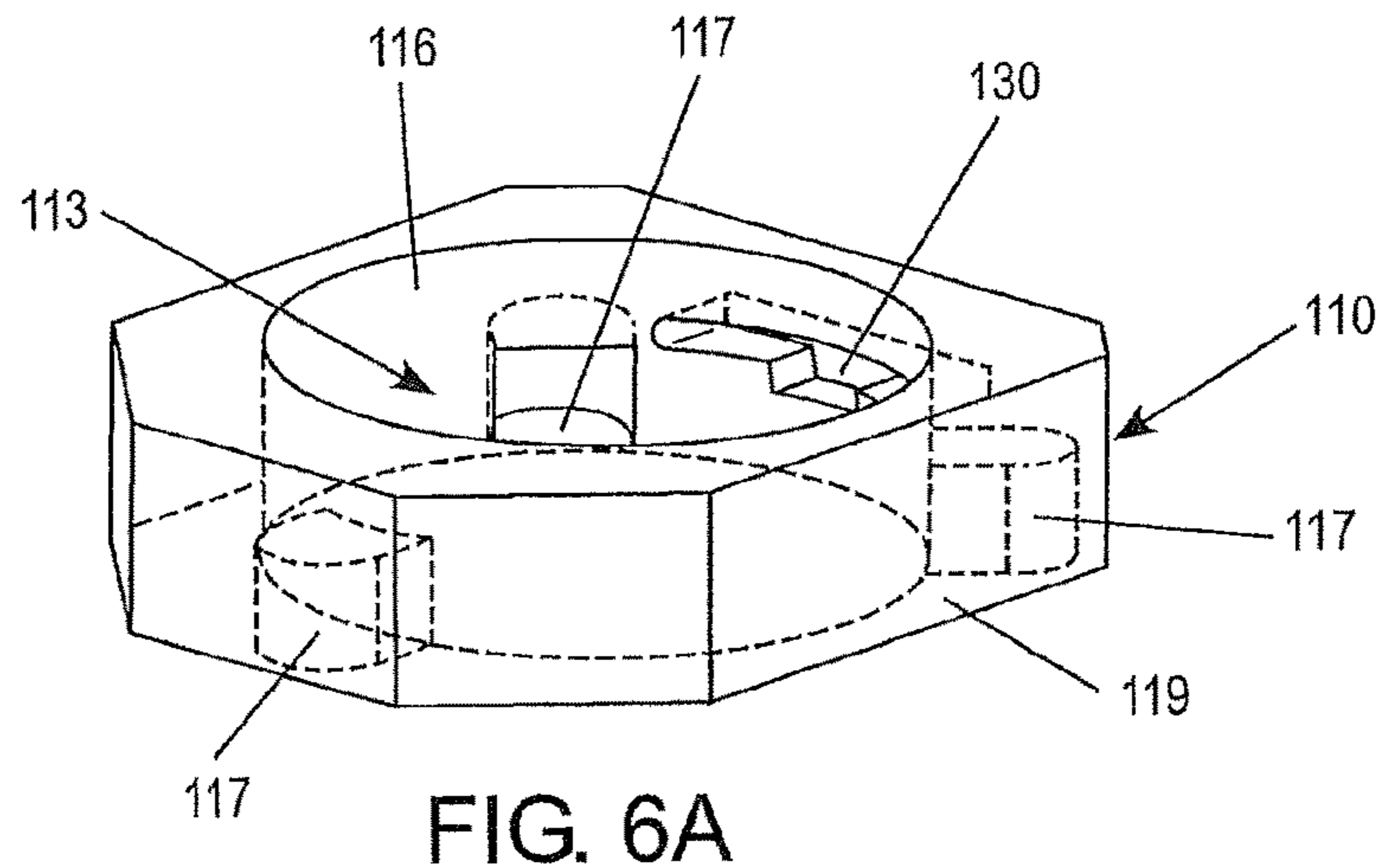


FIG. 6A

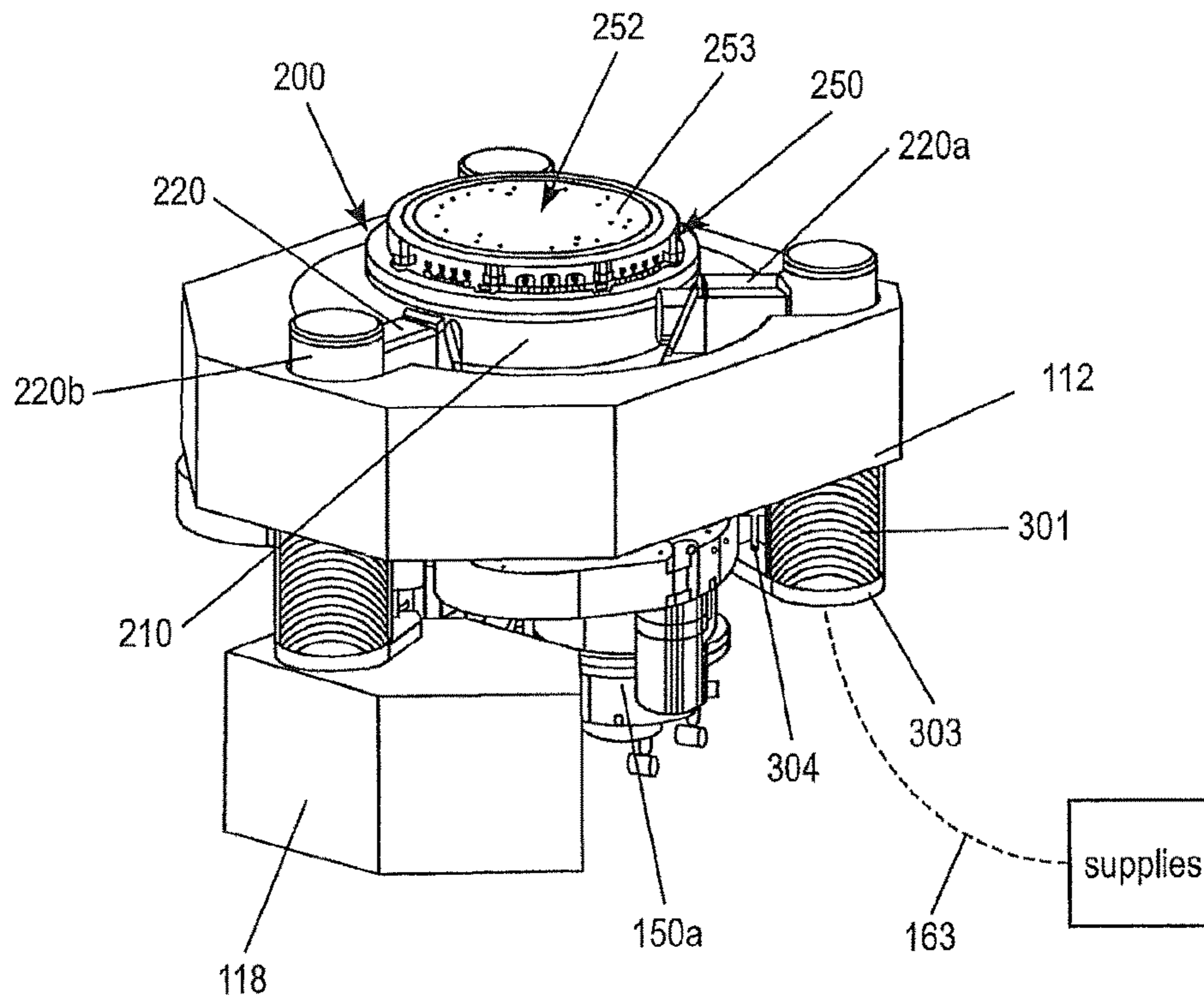


FIG. 6B

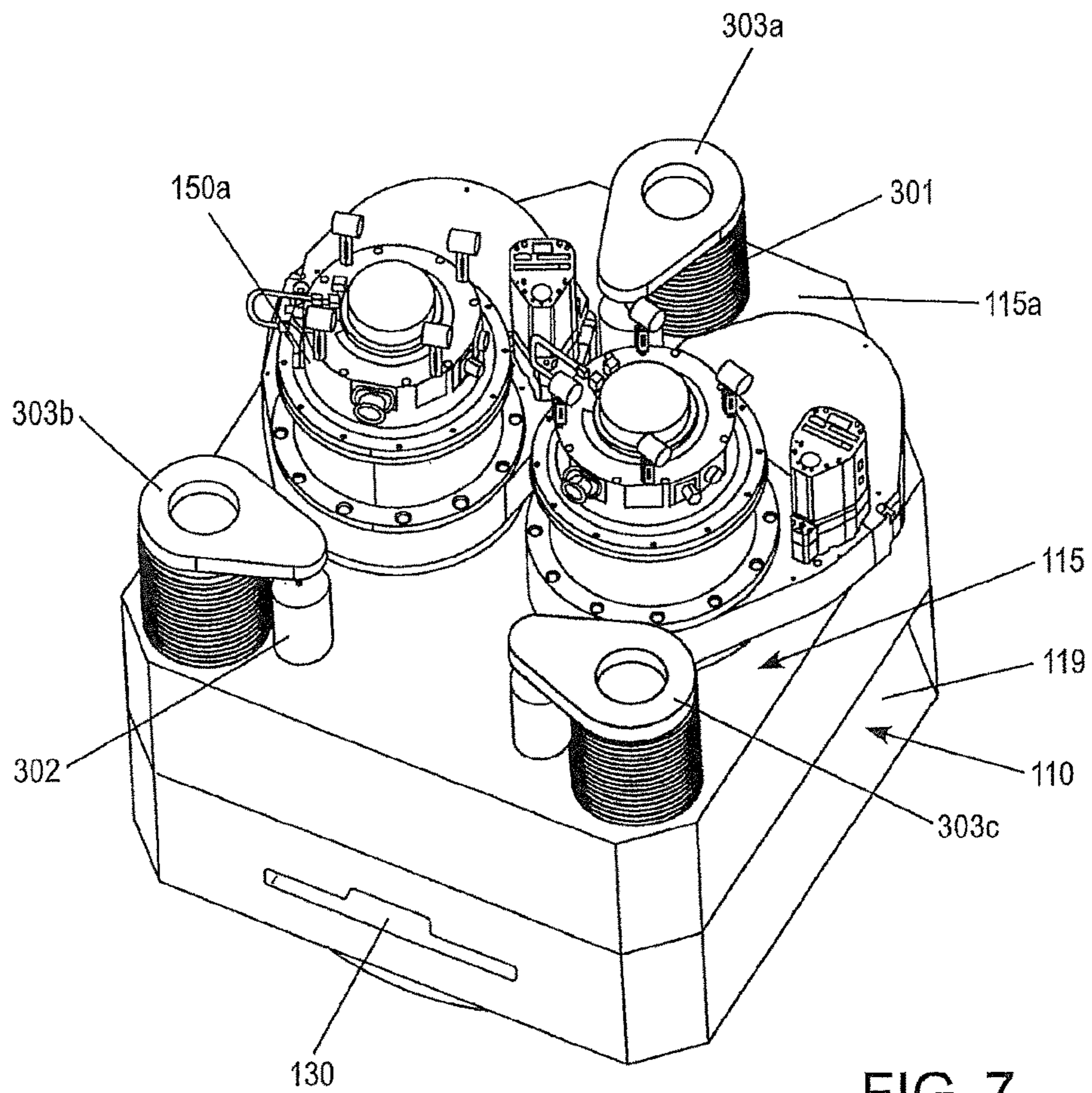


FIG. 7

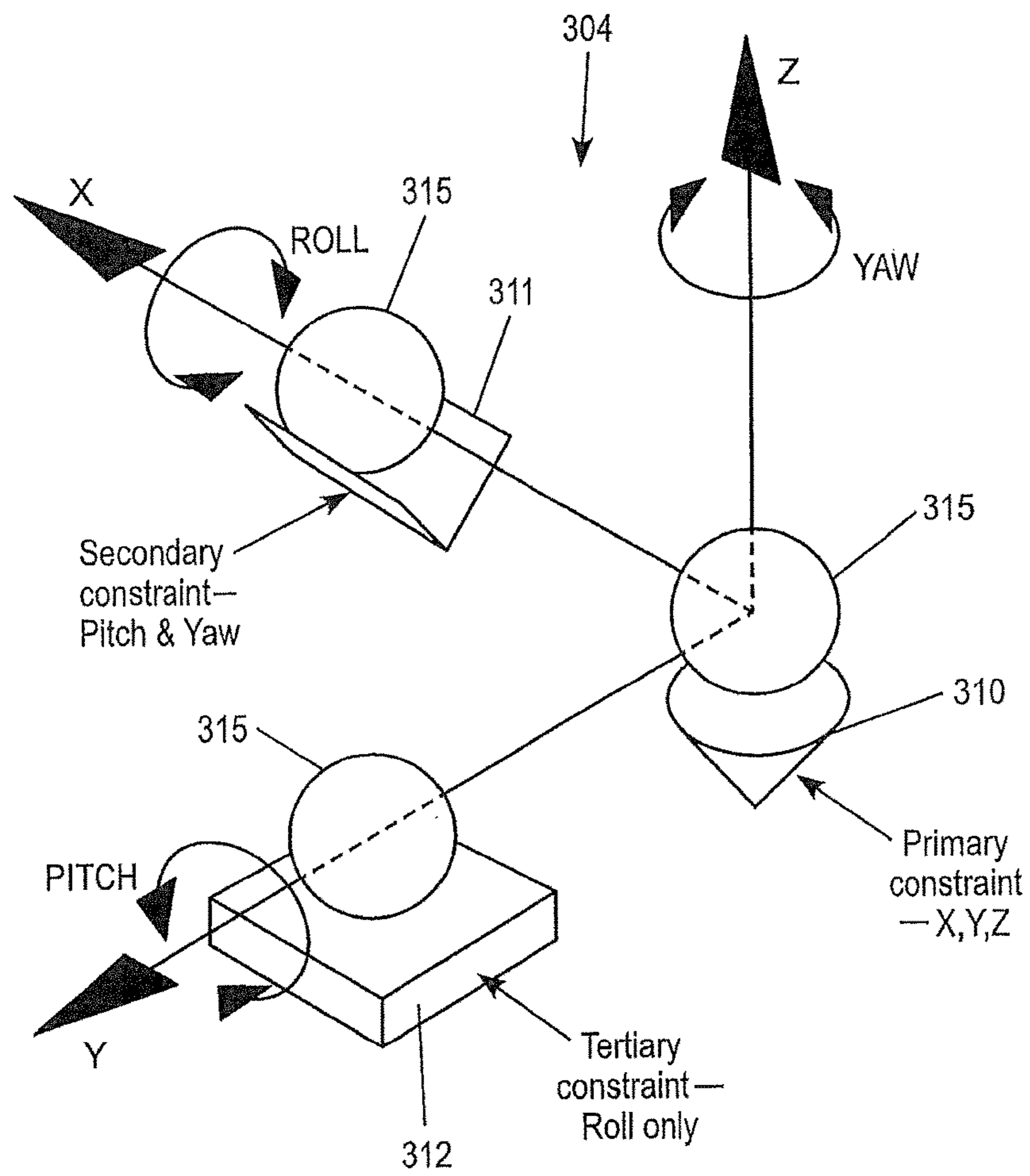


FIG. 8

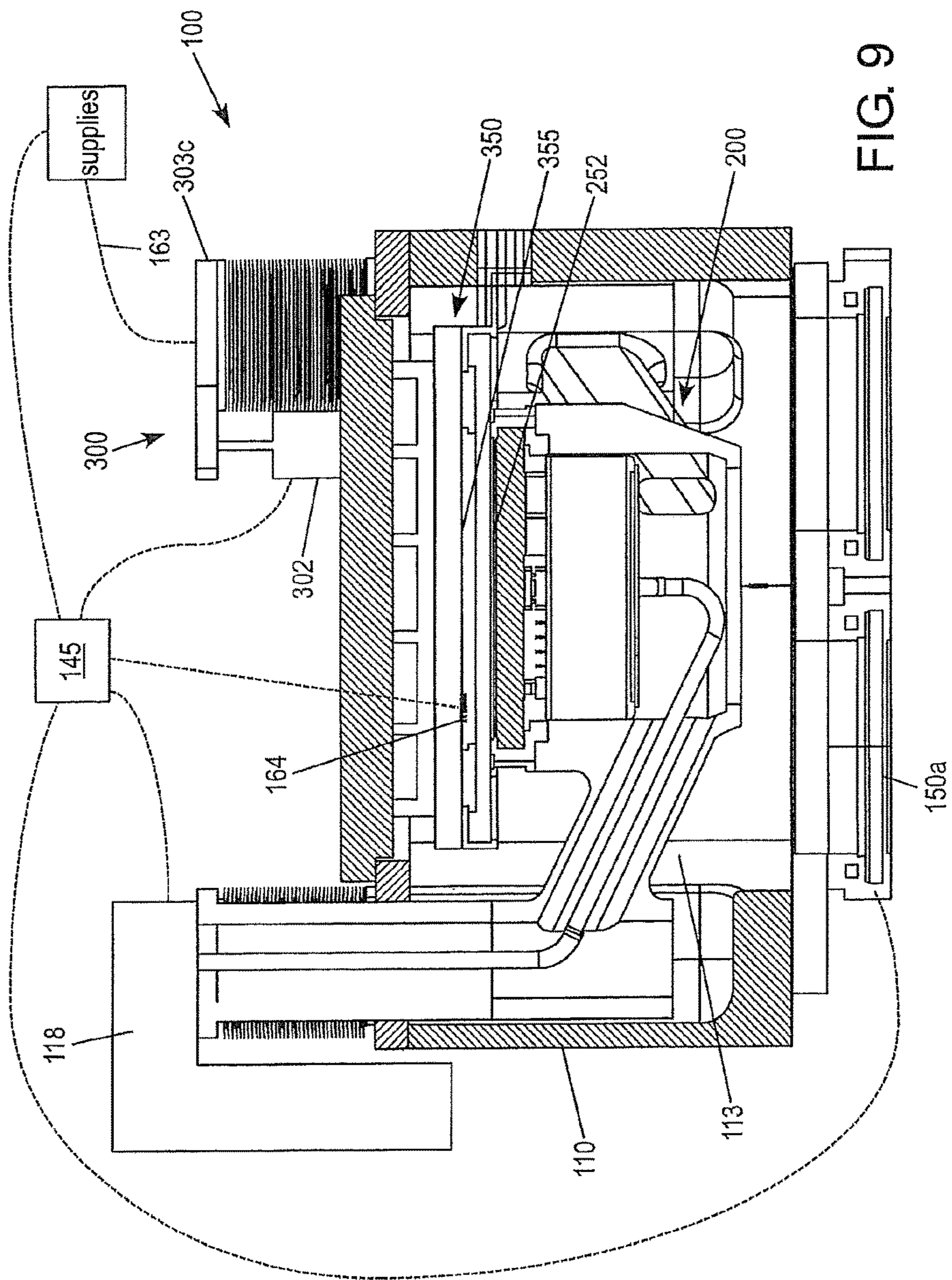


FIG. 9

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**SUBSTRATE SUPPORT PROVIDING GAP
HEIGHT AND PLANARIZATION
ADJUSTMENT IN PLASMA PROCESSING
CHAMBER**

Matter enclosed in heavy brackets [] appears in the original patent but forms no part of this reissue specification; matter printed in italics indicates the additions made by reissue; a claim printed with strikethrough indicates that the claim was canceled, disclaimed, or held invalid by a prior post-patent action or proceeding.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The invention relates to plasma processing apparatuses wherein a semiconductor substrate support is moveable in the interior of a vacuum chamber such that gap height and planarization of the substrate are adjustable.

BACKGROUND

Integrated circuits are typically formed from a substrate over which are formed patterned microelectronics layers. In the processing of the substrate, plasma is often employed to deposit films on the substrate or to etch intended portions of the films. Shrinking feature sizes and implementation of new materials in next generation microelectronics layers have put new demands on plasma processing equipment. The smaller features, larger substrate size and new processing techniques create additional demands on control of the plasma parameters, such as plasma density and etch uniformity across the substrate, to achieve desired yields.

In capacitively coupled RF plasma reactors, the electrode opposite to the substrate electrode is generally called the upper electrode. The upper electrode could be grounded, or have one or more radio frequency (RF) power sources attached to it. The substrate electrode is generally called the lower electrode. A mechanical arrangement for a lower electrode in a capacitively coupled plasma processing chamber may involve cantilevering the assembly that includes the lower electrode from a side of the chamber. This cantilevered lower electrode can be a fixed distance from the upper electrode or can be designed for a variable distance from the upper electrode. In either case, planarization of the lower electrode may be affected by sag and RF interference can occur when service conduits to the chuck are located in the interior of the cantilever support arm.

A cantilevered lower electrode assembly to increase planarity control between the upper and lower electrodes is disclosed in commonly-owned U.S. Patent Publication No. 2009/0199766, the disclosure of which is hereby incorporated by reference. While the '766 publication discloses an improved sidewall supported substrate support, due to the need to address smaller substrate features, larger substrate sizes, and new processing techniques, there is a need for improved gap height and planarity control between the upper and lower electrodes to increase etch uniformity across the substrate.

SUMMARY

Disclosed herein is a semiconductor substrate support for use in a plasma processing apparatus. The semiconductor substrate support comprises a chuck body having a plenum and three radially extending bores extending between the plenum and an outer periphery of the chuck body, wherein

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the chuck body is sized to support a semiconductor substrate having a diameter of at least 450 mm. The semiconductor substrate support further comprises tubular support arms which include a first section extending radially outward from the outer periphery of the chuck body, and a second section extending vertically from the first section wherein each of the tubular support arms defines a passage in communication with one of the radially extending bores. The second section of each tubular support arm is configured to engage with a respective actuation mechanism operable to effect vertical translation and planarization of the chuck body.

The semiconductor substrate support is located in the interior of a vacuum chamber of a capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus. The capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus further includes an upper showerhead electrode assembly supported by a top wall of the vacuum chamber, and a lower electrode assembly which is incorporated in the semiconductor substrate support. The lower electrode assembly comprises a lower electrode and an electrostatic chuck having a support surface on which a single semiconductor substrate is supported. The second sections of the tubular support arms are located in three openings in the outer wall of the vacuum chamber wherein they are coupled to the three actuation mechanisms. The three actuation mechanisms are located on an outer wall of the vacuum chamber and are independently operable to move the tubular support arms in upward and downward directions. The capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus further comprises at least one vacuum port connected to at least one vacuum pump, and a gas source to supply process gas to the vacuum chamber.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWING
FIGURES

FIG. 1 illustrates a cross-sectional schematic of an embodiment of a capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus.

FIG. 2 illustrates a cross section through the capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus shown in FIG. 1.

FIG. 3 illustrates a top view of the top wall of the capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus shown in FIG. 1.

FIG. 4A-C illustrate separable components of the capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus shown in FIG. 1.

FIG. 5 illustrates a cross section of an alternate embodiment of a capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus wherein the support arms extend through a bottom wall.

FIG. 6A,B illustrate components of the vacuum chamber and semiconductor substrate support of the alternate embodiment of the capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus shown in FIG. 5.

FIG. 7 illustrates a bottom view of the alternate embodiment of the capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus shown in FIG. 5.

FIG. 8 illustrates a schematic of a preferable kinematic mount configuration.

FIG. 9 illustrates a cross section of an embodiment of a capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus wherein the apparatus is electronically connected to a control system.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

A substrate support and plasma processing chamber will now be described in detail with reference to a few embodi-

ments thereof as illustrated in the accompanying drawings. In the following description, numerous specific details are set forth in order to provide a thorough understanding of the embodiments disclosed herein. It will be apparent, however, to one skilled in the art, that the embodiments disclosed herein may be practiced without some or all of these specific details. In other instances, well known process steps and/or structures have not been described in detail in order to not unnecessarily obscure the embodiments disclosed herein.

Disclosed herein is a substrate support and plasma processing chamber which improves plasma etch uniformity across a semiconductor substrate through mechanical adjustment of a semiconductor substrate support in an interior of a vacuum chamber of a plasma processing apparatus. The semiconductor substrate support is finely adjustable with respect to a gap height and a planarization between a top surface of the semiconductor substrate support and a bottom surface of an upper electrode assembly supported by the top wall of the vacuum chamber. The semiconductor substrate support allows in-situ adjustments of the semiconductor substrate with respect to gap height and planarization to optimize etch uniformity of the semiconductor substrate.

FIG. 1 is a cross-sectional schematic of an embodiment of a capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus 100 electronically connected to a control system 145, for a dry process reactor system, having an upper showerhead electrode assembly 350 for ion plasma density distribution control capability. A gas source 140 supplies a process gas through the upper showerhead electrode assembly 350 and is excited into a plasma via an RF power source 160 which provides RF power to the upper showerhead electrode assembly 350 to generate plasma in the gap between the upper showerhead electrode assembly 350 and a lower electrode assembly 250. The capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus 100 may be used in semiconductor fabrication for performing various semiconductor processes, such as dry etching, chemical vapor deposition (CVD), or other treatment of a semiconductor substrate 50.

FIG. 2 illustrates a cross section through the length of an embodiment of a capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus 100. The capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus 100 comprises a vacuum chamber 110, a semiconductor substrate support 200 including the lower electrode assembly 250 in an interior 113 of the vacuum chamber 110, the upper showerhead electrode assembly 350 supported by a top wall 114 of the vacuum chamber 110, dual vacuum pumps 150a operable to maintain the vacuum chamber 110 at a predetermined vacuum pressure, and a gas source (not shown) operable to supply process gases to the vacuum chamber 110. Process gases may be introduced into the vacuum chamber 110 via one or more source gas inlets and spent process gases and etchant by-products may be exhausted from the vacuum chamber 110 via dual vacuum ports 150. In some embodiments, the process gases may be introduced into the vacuum chamber 110 at a flow rate of about 5 to about 50,000 sccm (standard cubic centimeters per minute), and preferably at a flow rate of about 10 to about 5,000 sccm.

The semiconductor substrate support 200 is raised and lowered by three independent actuation mechanisms 300 such that a gap height and planarization between the semiconductor substrate support 200 and the upper showerhead electrode assembly 350 may be adjusted. The semiconductor substrate support 200 comprises a chuck body 210 including the lower electrode assembly 250, a plenum 211, and three radially extending bores 212 which extend between the plenum 211 and an outer periphery 213 of the chuck body

210. Three tubular support arms 220 each include a first section 220a extending radially outward from the outer periphery 213 of the chuck body 210, and a second section 220b extending vertically from the first section 220a. The second section 220b is configured to engage a respective actuation mechanism 300 located outside of the vacuum chamber 110 operable to effect vertical translation and planarization of the semiconductor substrate support 200.

The first sections 220a of the tubular support arms 220 may extend outward either perpendicularly or at an angle to a vertical axis passing through the center of the chuck body 210. In one embodiment, the first sections 220a are angled upwardly from the chuck body 210. In another embodiment, the first sections 220a extend horizontally from the chuck body 210 at an angle perpendicular to a vertical axis passing through the center of the chuck body 210. (As illustrated in FIG. 6B)

The first and second sections 220a, 220b of the tubular support arms 220 can have any desired cross sectional shape such as a generally rectangular tube shape and/or a generally cylindrical tube shape. The tubular support arms 220 each comprise an inner passage 223, extending between first ends 221a and second ends 221b of the tubular support arms 220. The tubular support arms 220 have a first end 221a hermetically sealed to the chuck body 210 and a second end 221b coupled to a respective actuation mechanism 300 such that the respective radially extending bores 212 and the passages 223 of the tubular support arms 220 allow access from outside of the vacuum chamber 110 to the plenum 211 of the chuck body 210.

The tubular support arms 220 can be formed out of a single piece of material, or a plurality of separate parts mechanically attached or bonded (e.g., welded) together. The tubular support arms can be attached or bonded to the semiconductor substrate support 200 such that the tubular support arms are hermetically sealed to the chuck body 210.

The lower electrode assembly 250 of the chuck body 210 includes a lower electrode 251 and an electrostatic chuck (ESC) 252 for holding the semiconductor substrate 50 in place on a support surface 253 of the ESC 252. In other embodiments the chuck can be a vacuum or mechanical chuck. The vacuum chamber 110 has an opening 130 (as illustrated in FIG. 6A) in a side wall 119 such that the semiconductor substrate 50 may be transferred into the chamber and loaded/unloaded on and off the support surface 253 of the ESC 252. Additionally other suitable mechanisms, such as a lift pin mechanism for lifting the substrate, optical sensors, and a cooling mechanism for cooling the lower electrode assembly 250, are attached to or form portions of the lower electrode assembly 250. In a preferred embodiment the lower electrode assembly 250 further comprises a temperature controlled base plate 254.

Each tubular support arm 220 provides a passage 223 for receiving service conduits 163 which extend through the tubular support arm 220 into the chuck body 210 through the respective radially extending bore 212. The service conduits 163 are configured to supply at least one of a heat transfer gas, temperature controlled liquid coolant, RF energy, pressurized air, electrical monitoring signals, or electrical actuating signals to or from the chuck body 210. For instance, a service conduit could be used to supply pressurized gas to a pneumatic actuator of a lift pin mechanism in the lower electrode assembly 250. Other service conduits 163 can also be provided for various functions such as monitoring temperature of the substrate support 200 or pressure of the backside cooling gas, supplying nitrogen, helium, or clean

dry air (“CDA”) to keep moisture out of the service via, and/or supplying electrical power to components of the substrate support **200**.

The service conduits **163** extend through the passages **223** of the tubular support arms **220** to the facility components located under the lower electrode assembly **250**. Although the passages **223** are open to the atmosphere the summation of the atmospheric pressure in the plenum **211** does not yield any atmospheric load on the substrate support.

The tubular support arms **220** are preferably formed of a conducting material such as aluminum or anodized aluminum. Because outer peripheries **222a** of the tubular support arms **220** are exposed to reactive process gases, the tubular support arms **220** can have an outer protective coating such as thermal sprayed yttria, or other material, compatible with the process gases.

A top or bottom wall **114**, **115** of the vacuum chamber **110** can support an RF match **118**. An RF transmission member **162** supplies the RF energy to the lower electrode assembly **250** during operation. The RF transmission member **162** preferably supplies RF energy through one tubular support arm **220** and respective radially extending bore **212** into the plenum **211** of the chuck body **210** wherein it is coupled to the lower electrode **251**. The RF energy can have at least one frequency of, for example, about 2 MHz to about 100 MHz, e.g., 27 MHz and/or 60 MHz. Higher frequencies such as 13.56, 27, and/or 60 MHz can be used to excite the process gas to produce plasma in the gap between the upper and lower electrodes **353**, **251**, while another frequency, e.g. 2 MHz, of RF energy supplied to the lower electrode can provide RF bias to the substrate. The RF transmission member **162** is formed of a suitable conducting material. An RF connection (not shown) located near the first end **221a** of the respective tubular support arm **220** collects the RF energy transmitted through the RF transmission member **162** and delivers the RF energy to the lower electrode assembly **250**.

The level of RF matching between the RF supply and RF conductor depends on the dimensions of the RF transmission member **162**. The lengths and diameters of the RF transmission member **162** extending through at least one tubular support arm **220** preferably have optimum values so that the RF power delivered through the RF transmission member **162** is optimized in a wide RF frequency range. In the illustrated embodiment, both the RF transmission member **162** and the RF match **118** are moved together during the gap adjustment. Thus, once the RF transmission member **162** is set to its optimum configuration, the configuration can be maintained without further adjustment when employing different gap heights during plasma processing.

In a preferred embodiment the RF transmission member **162** is isolated from the rest of the supplies being fed into the chuck body **210**. The RF transmission member **162** will extend through one tubular support arm **220** into the chuck body **210**, such as to electrically isolate the RF supply from the rest of the supplies, i.e. the heater power, ESC power, and gas supplies. Such electrical isolation will alleviate the need to filter residual RF from the RF transmission member **162** that could couple to the RF energy causing interference.

FIG. **3** illustrates a top view of the top wall **114** of the capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus **100**. The top wall **114** has three openings **112** circumferentially spaced on a top surface **114a** of the top wall **114** of the vacuum chamber **110** wherein the second sections **220b** of the tubular support arms **220** are movably located. In a preferred assembly the three openings **112** are spaced apart forming three angles therebetween, wherein two of the

angles are between 120 and 165 degrees and the third angle is between 35 and 120 degrees.

FIG. **4A** illustrates a preferred embodiment wherein the second sections **220b** of the tubular support arms **220** are movably located in three respective openings **112** in the top wall **114** of the vacuum chamber **110**. In one embodiment, the second ends **221b** of the tubular support arms **220** are affixed to respective actuation mechanisms **300** located on the top surface **114a** of the top wall **114** of the vacuum chamber **110** such that the actuation mechanisms **300** may perform a vertical translation of the semiconductor substrate support **200** by moving the support arms vertically through the openings **112** in the top wall **114**. In an alternate embodiment, the second ends **221b** of the tubular support arms **220** are affixed to respective actuation mechanisms **300** located on a bottom surface **115a** of the bottom wall **115** of the vacuum chamber **110** such that the actuation mechanisms **300** may perform a vertical translation of the semiconductor substrate support by moving the support arms vertically through the openings **112** in the bottom wall **115**. (See FIG. **6B**).

The three actuation mechanisms **300** can each include a stepper motor **302** coupled to a flange **303** with the flange **303** supporting the respective second end **221b** of each tubular support arm **220**. In a preferred embodiment the actuation mechanisms **300** are coupled to the flanges **303** via a kinematic mounting arrangement **304**.

“Kinematic mounting” means a technique of removably mounting a rigid object relative to another rigid object so as to yield a very accurate, reproducible positioning of the objects with respect to each other. The position of the first object is defined by six points of contact with the second. These six points must not over or under constrain the position of the first object. In one common form of kinematic mounting, three balls **315** on the first object contact features such as a conical depression **310**, a V-shape (or groove) **311**, and a flat contact **312**, respectively, on the second object. The three balls **315** fit snugly within the three features **310**, **311**, **312** forming three angles therebetween, wherein two of the angles are between 120 and 165 degrees and the third angle is between 35 and 120 degrees. In a preferred embodiment the three angles formed therebetween have two angles between 120 and 140 degrees and the third angle between 80 and 120 degrees (see FIG. **8**). The foregoing are only examples of mounting arrangements; numerous other kinematic mounting arrangements can also be used.

FIG. **4A** illustrates a preferred embodiment of the kinematic mounting arrangement **304** supporting the semiconductor substrate support **200** comprising the features schematically illustrated in FIG. **8**. The kinematic mounting arrangement **304** comprises three stepper motors **302** coupled to three tear drop flanges **303a,b,c**. Each flange **303a,b,c** comprises a feature wherein the first tear drop flange **303a** comprises the conical depression **310**, the second tear drop flange **303b** comprises the V-shape **311**, and the third tear drop flange **303c** comprises the flat contact **312**. Each stepper motor **302** drives a ball-tipped screw (not shown) wherein one screw supports each respective flange **303a,b,c** and makes contact with each respective feature of each flange **303a,b,c**. The flange **303a,b,c** comprises an opening **305** for passage of service conduits **163** therethrough in conjunction with the passages **223** of the respective tubular support arms **220** and respective radially extending bores **212**.

The stepper motors **302** are independently controlled by the control system **145** (see FIG. **1**). The stepper motors **302**

can be used to vary the tilt, pitch, and elevation of the semiconductor substrate support **200**. The kinematic mounting assembly **304** which varies gap height and planarization through the independent control of the stepper motors increases stability as well as accommodates thermal expansion of the actuation mechanisms **300**.

As illustrated in FIG. **4B** the vacuum chamber **110** includes a cylindrical inner wall **116** with three vertical channels **117** extending into the inner wall **116**. Each second section **220b** of the tubular support arms **220** is located in and movable in the respective channels **117**. The second sections **220b** of the tubular support arms **220** are preferably centered in the vertical channels **117** by the kinematic alignment created by the six point kinematic mounting arrangement **304** such that rubbing does not occur between the surface of the vertical channels **117** and the outer peripheries **222a** of the tubular support arms **220**. Additionally, the vacuum chamber **110** comprises the opening **130** in a sidewall **119** wherein semiconductor substrates may be loaded/unloaded therethrough.

FIG. **4C** illustrates dual vacuum ports **150** wherein vacuum pumps **150a** can remove etch byproducts and maintain a low pressure in the interior **113** of the vacuum chamber **110**.

As illustrated in FIG. **2** the upper showerhead electrode assembly **350** preferably comprises a showerhead electrode including an upper electrode **353** and an optional backing member (not shown) secured to the upper electrode **353**, a thermal control plate **352**, and a top plate. The top plate can form a removable top wall **114** of the vacuum chamber **110** of the capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus **100**. In a preferred embodiment the upper showerhead electrode assembly **350** can also include a cooling plate **351** and a C-shaped confinement ring **354**. Further details of the C-shaped confinement ring **354** can be found in commonly-owned U.S. Pat. No. 6,974,523, which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.

The upper electrode **353** can be composed, for example, of silicon or silicon carbide. The upper electrode **353** is preferably a showerhead electrode including gas injection holes (not shown) for distributing gas in the vacuum chamber **110**. The upper electrode **353** can be a one-piece electrode (e.g., a disc-shaped showerhead electrode with gas injection holes), or a multi-piece electrode (e.g., an inner disc-shaped showerhead electrode surrounded by an outer electrode ring, such as a continuous or segmented ring without gas injection holes).

In a multi-piece arrangement the inner electrode member is preferably a cylindrical plate (e.g., single crystal silicon). The inner electrode member can have a diameter smaller than, equal to, or larger than the 450 mm semiconductor substrate **50** to be processed. In alternate embodiments, the upper showerhead electrode assembly **350** and the semiconductor substrate support **200** including the chuck body **210** can be removably mounted within the vacuum chamber **110**.

The upper showerhead electrode assembly **350** preferably comprises a C-shaped confinement ring **354** for confining the plasma to the space surrounded by the upper and lower electrode assemblies **350**, **250** while allowing neutral gas constituents in the gap to pass through the gaps in a generally horizontal direction. Then, neutral gas constituents flow into the space between the inner cylindrical wall **116** of the vacuum chamber **110** and the outer surface of the C-shaped confinement ring **354**. The C-shaped confinement ring **354** encloses substantially all of an inter-electrode volume between the upper showerhead electrode assembly **350** and lower electrode assembly **250**. The C-shaped con-

finement ring **354** can include a plurality of openings, each opening extending substantially a length of an inter-electrode gap between the planar surfaces of the first and the second electrodes and facilitating gas flow from the gap between the upper and lower electrode assemblies **350**, **250** to the vacuum pump **150**.

The pressure in the interelectrode gap is controlled by the vacuum pump assembly attached to the bottom surface **115a** of the bottom wall **115** of the vacuum chamber **110**. As such, the C-shaped confinement ring **354** separates the gap for plasma excitation from the remaining interior **113** of the vacuum chamber **110**. In general, the volume of the gap is small compared to that of the vacuum chamber **110**. Because the etch rate of the semiconductor substrate **50** is directly affected by the plasma in the gap, the C-shaped confinement ring **354** enables a small volume pressure control and plasma confinement over the entire range of the gap without major physical change to the vacuum chamber **110**. Also, as the volume of the gap is small, the plasma conditions can be controlled quickly and accurately.

In a preferred embodiment of the capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus **100**, the three actuation mechanisms **300** are independently controllable with respect to each other. Independent control of each actuation mechanism **300** allows for vertical translation of the semiconductor substrate support **200** as well as planarization between the support surface **253** of the ESC **252** and the bottom surface **355** of the upper showerhead electrode assembly **350**. Control of the gap level and the planarization of the support surface **253** of the ESC **252** can provide more uniform etch results in plasma processing apparatus **100**.

In the embodiment illustrated in FIG. **4A-C**, the three actuation mechanisms **300** are located on the top surface **114a** of the top wall **114** of the vacuum chamber **110**. The second sections **220b** of the tubular support arms **220** are each located in a respective opening **112** in the top wall **114** of the vacuum chamber **110**. Each second end **221b** of the tubular support arms **220** is coupled to the respective actuation mechanism **300**, and maintains an airtight expandable vacuum seal **301** between an outer periphery **222a** of the tubular support arm **220** and the top surface **114a** of the top wall **114** of the vacuum chamber **110**. Each airtight vacuum seal **301** is expandable such that each tubular support arm **220** may be vertically translated by the respective actuation mechanism **300** while maintaining a desired vacuum pressure in the vacuum chamber **110**. The RF match **118** is coupled to one actuation mechanism **300** suspended above the top wall **114** such that the RF match **118** will travel with the support arm during vertical translation of the semiconductor substrate support **200**.

FIG. **5** shows a cross section through the length of an alternate embodiment of the capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus **100** wherein the three actuation mechanisms **300** are located on the bottom surface **115a** of the bottom wall **115** of the vacuum chamber **110**. The second sections **220b** of the tubular support arms **220** are each located in a respective opening **112** in the bottom wall **115** of the vacuum chamber **110**. Each second end **221b** of the tubular support arms **220** is coupled to the respective actuation mechanism **300**, and maintains an airtight expandable vacuum seal **301** between an outer periphery **222a** of the tubular support arm **220** and the bottom surface **115a** of the bottom wall **115** of the vacuum chamber **110**. Each airtight vacuum seal **301** is expandable such that each tubular support arm **220** may be vertically translated by the respective actuation mechanism **300** while maintaining a desired vacuum pressure in the vacuum chamber **110**. The RF match

118 is coupled to one actuation mechanism **300** suspended below the bottom wall **115** such that the RF match **118** travels with the support arm during vertical translation of the semiconductor substrate support **200**.

As illustrated in FIG. **9** the capacitively-coupled plasma operating apparatus **100** is electronically connected to the control system **145**. The control system **145** is electronically connected to the RF power supply and the RF match network **118**, the three actuation mechanisms **300**, a semiconductor handling system (not shown) for loading and unloading semiconductor substrates, the gas supply, the vacuum pump **150**, and the cooling system. The control system **145** controls and coordinates the operation of the above-mentioned systems through respective electronic signals. The actuation mechanisms **300** are each independently controlled by the control system **145**. In a preferred embodiment, the control system **145** vertically positions the semiconductor substrate support **200** within the interior **113** of the vacuum chamber **110** via the transmission of electronic signals to the respective stepper motors **302** comprised in the actuation mechanisms **300**. The kinematic mounting arrangement **304** comprised between the stepper motors **302** and flanges **303a,b,c** is configured to effectuate a degree of precision in adjusting the gap, preferably to few tenths of microns and in adjusting the planarization, preferably to less than a thousandth of a degree. In alternate embodiments, other drive mechanisms can be used such as a servo motor arrangement.

Additionally, the control system **145** is preferably electronically connected to at least one in-situ sensor for measuring the gap height and planarity such that the gap control and planarization control are performed in a feedback control mode. Various types of in-situ detectors, such as laser, inductive, capacitive, acoustic, linear variable differential transformer (LDVT) sensors, can be used as a gap and planarity sensor and located either inside or outside the vacuum chamber **110**, depending on the type of sensor. In a preferred embodiment a laser interferometer **164** is coupled to the bottom surface **355** of the upper showerhead electrode assembly **350**. The at least one laser interferometer **164** provides signals to the control system **145** to effect real time measurements of the gap height and the planarization between the support surface **253** of the ESC **252** and the upper showerhead electrode assembly **350**.

As illustrated in FIG. **7** the vacuum chamber **110** is coupled to a vacuum pump system located in the bottom wall **115** of the vacuum chamber **110** via dual vacuum ports **150** in the bottom wall **115**. The vacuum pump system includes dual vacuum pumps **150a**, such as a turbo-molecular pump of the kind typically used in plasma reactor systems, a respective gate valve (not shown) arranged between the semiconductor substrate support **200** and the vacuum pump **150a** for controlling the vacuum level in the interior **113** of the vacuum chamber **110**. The vacuum pump system can include a roughing pump (not shown) connected to the vacuum pump **150a** and the vacuum chamber **110** for initially pumping down the vacuum chamber interior region **113**. The gate valve can be electromechanical so that it can be remotely operated via an electrical signal from the control system **145**. The vacuum pump system and the process gas together are capable of reducing the pressure in chamber to between approximately 1 mTorr and approximately 1 Torr, depending on the application. The location of the vacuum pump system directly underneath chuck body **210** in the present embodiment is made possible by tubular support arms **220**, and preferably serves to make the flow of gas axially symmetric.

Embodiments disclosed herein enable precise lower electrode orientation with regard to gap height and planarization for processing 450 mm wafers. The adjustment of lower electrode gap height and planarization may take place while a plasma processing system is under vacuum, atmosphere, and/or in-situ, since the user interfaces are disposed outside the plasma processing chamber. Embodiments disclosed herein may also allow the adjustment to be made with no disassembly of the plasma processing system. Advantageously, system down time may be minimized, and productivity need not be compromised, while the needs for electrode gap height and planarization adjustments are satisfied.

While the invention has been described in detail with reference to specific embodiments thereof, it will be apparent to those skilled in the art that various changes and modifications can be made, and equivalents employed, without departing from the scope of the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A semiconductor substrate support for use in a plasma processing apparatus comprising:

a chuck body having a plenum and three radially extending bores extending between the plenum and an outer periphery of the chuck body, the chuck body sized to support a semiconductor substrate having a diameter of at least 450 mm; and

three tubular support arms attached to the chuck body, each of the tubular support arms including a first section extending radially outward from the outer periphery of the chuck body and a second section extending vertically from the first section, each of the tubular support arms defining a passage in communication with one of the bores, each of the second sections configured to engage with a respective actuation mechanism operable to effect vertical translation for gap height and planarization adjustment of the chuck body.

2. The semiconductor substrate support of claim 1, wherein the first sections of the tubular support arms extend outward either perpendicularly or at an angle to a vertical axis passing through the center of the chuck body.

3. The semiconductor substrate support of claim 1, wherein the second sections of the tubular support arms extend from the respective first sections of the tubular support arms vertically above the chuck body or extend from the respective first sections of the tubular support arms vertically below the chuck body.

4. The semiconductor substrate support of claim 1, wherein the tubular support arms are circumferentially spaced apart forming three angles therebetween, two of the angles being between 120 and 165 degrees and [the] a third angle being between 35 and 120 degrees.

5. A capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus comprising:

a vacuum chamber;
the semiconductor substrate support of claim 1 in an interior of the vacuum chamber;
an upper showerhead electrode assembly supported by a top wall of the vacuum chamber;
a lower electrode assembly incorporated in the semiconductor substrate support wherein the lower electrode assembly comprises a lower electrode and an electrostatic chuck (ESC) having a support surface on which the semiconductor substrate is supported;
three openings in an outer wall of the vacuum chamber in which the second sections of the tubular support arms are located;

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three actuation mechanisms on the outer wall and connected to the second sections of the tubular support arms, the three actuation mechanisms operable to independently move the tubular support arms in upward and downward directions;

at least one vacuum port in a bottom wall connected to at least one vacuum pump operable to maintain the vacuum chamber at a predetermined vacuum pressure; and

a gas source operable to supply process gas through the upper showerhead electrode assembly to the vacuum chamber.

6. The capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus of claim 5, wherein an expandable vacuum seal seals each opening in the outer wall and maintains a vacuum tight seal between an outer periphery of each tubular support arm and the outer wall such that each tubular support arm may be vertically translated by the respective actuation mechanism without exposing the interior of the vacuum chamber to atmospheric pressure.

7. The capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus of claim 5, wherein the three actuation mechanisms are independently controllable with respect to each other to effect a predetermined gap height between the upper showerhead electrode assembly and the support surface of the ESC and a predetermined planarization of the support surface of the ESC.

8. The capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus of claim 7, wherein each actuation mechanism comprises a stepper motor coupled to a mount on the outer wall of the vacuum chamber, the mount affixed to the respective tubular support arm such that the tubular support arm is movably located in the respective opening in the outer wall of the vacuum chamber.

9. The capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus of claim 6, wherein the three actuation mechanisms are located on a top surface of the top wall of the vacuum chamber.

10. The capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus of claim 6, wherein the three actuation mechanisms are located on a bottom surface of the bottom wall of the vacuum chamber.

11. The capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus of claim 5, wherein the vacuum chamber includes two vacuum ports in the bottom wall of the vacuum chamber, the bottom wall being separated from the semiconductor substrate support by an open area, the vacuum ports being connected to two vacuum pumps which remove gases from the interior of the vacuum chamber and maintain the interior of the vacuum chamber at a pressure below 500 mTorr.

12. The capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus of claim 5, wherein the semiconductor substrate support includes a plurality of service conduits extending through one or more of the passages of the tubular support arms into the chuck body through [the] radially extending bores, the service conduits supplying at least one of a heat transfer gas, temperature controlled liquid coolant, RF energy, pressurized air, electrical monitoring signals or electrical actuating signals to or from the chuck body.

13. The capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus of claim 5, wherein the lower electrode is coupled to a radio frequency (RF) power supply via an RF transmission member extending through one of the tubular support arms.

14. The capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus of claim 13, wherein only the RF transmission member is located in one of the tubular support arms, and service conduits for supplying at least one of a heat transfer gas,

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temperature controlled liquid, pressurized air, electrical monitoring signals, or electrical actuating signals to or from the chuck body are located in one or more of the other tubular support arms.

5 15. The capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus of claim 5, wherein the upper showerhead electrode assembly includes a C-shaped confinement ring positioned about [the] a periphery of the upper showerhead electrode assembly and the lower electrode assembly within the vacuum chamber, the C-shaped confinement ring enclosing substantially all of an inter-electrode volume between the upper showerhead electrode assembly and lower electrode assembly and comprising a plurality of openings, each of the openings extending substantially a length of an inter-electrode gap between [the] planar surfaces of the upper showerhead electrode assembly and the support surface of the ESC and facilitating gas exhaustion from the inter-electrode volume to the remaining volume of the vacuum chamber.

16. The capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus of claim 5, wherein the lower electrode assembly further comprises a temperature controlled base plate.

17. The capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus of claim 5, wherein the vacuum chamber includes a cylindrical inner wall with three vertical channels extending into the cylindrical inner wall, the tubular support arms located in and movable vertically in the vertical channels.

18. [A] The capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus according to claim 5, further including a control system in electrical communication with said actuation mechanisms for controlling gap height and planarization.

19. The capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus of claim 18, further comprising at least one laser interferometer, the laser interferometer providing signals to the control system to effect real time measurements of the gap height and the planarization between the upper showerhead electrode assembly and the support surface of the ESC.

20. The capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus of claim 19, wherein the control system controls the actuation mechanisms to adjust in situ, gap height and planarization between the upper showerhead electrode assembly and the support surface of the ESC to effectuate uniform etching of the semiconductor substrate based on the measurements taken by the at least one laser interferometers.

21. A method of etching a semiconductor substrate in [a] the capacitively-coupled plasma processing apparatus according to claim 5 comprising:

placing [a] the semiconductor substrate on the support surface of the ESC inside the vacuum chamber;

vertically translating the semiconductor substrate support to achieve a predetermined gap height between the semiconductor substrate and a bottom surface of the upper showerhead electrode assembly;

measuring planarization between the semiconductor substrate and the bottom surface of the upper showerhead electrode assembly to determine if desired planarization between [said] the semiconductor substrate and the upper showerhead electrode assembly exists;

adjusting in-situ the planarization of the semiconductor substrate relative to the bottom surface of the upper showerhead electrode assembly;

supplying a gas into the vacuum chamber from a gas supply; and

energizing the gas into a plasma state and etching the semiconductor substrate with the plasma.

22. The method of claim 21, wherein the in-situ planarization of the semiconductor substrate is adjusted during the plasma etching.

23. A substrate support of a substrate processing apparatus comprising: a substrate support configured to support a substrate on an upper surface thereof; and three tubular support arms attached to the substrate support, each of the tubular support arms configured to engage via a mounting arrangement with a respective actuation mechanism operable to effect gap height and planarization adjustment of the substrate support, each mounting arrangement including a ball in contact with a different geometric shape.

24. The substrate support of claim 23, wherein the three tubular support arms each include a first section extending radially outward from an outer periphery of the substrate support and a second section extending vertically from the first section.

25. The substrate support of claim 24, wherein the first sections of the tubular support arms extend outward either perpendicularly or at an angle to a vertical axis passing through the center of the substrate support.

26. The substrate support of claim 24, wherein the second sections of the tubular support arms extend from the respective first sections of the tubular support arms vertically above the substrate support or extend from the respective first sections of the tubular support arms vertically below the substrate support.

27. The substrate support of claim 23, wherein the substrate support has a plenum and three radially extending bores extending between the plenum and an outer periphery of the substrate support wherein each of the tubular support arms defines a passage that is in communication with a respective bore.

28. The substrate support of claim 23, wherein the tubular support arms are circumferentially spaced apart forming three angles therebetween, two of the angles being 120 to 165 degrees and a third angle being 35 to 120 degrees.

29. The substrate support of claim 23, further comprising a lower electrode assembly incorporated therein wherein the lower electrode assembly includes a lower electrode.

30. The substrate support of claim 23, further comprising an electrostatic chuck (ESC) therein.

31. A substrate processing apparatus comprising: a vacuum chamber; a substrate support in an interior of the vacuum chamber wherein the substrate support comprises a lower electrode and is configured to support a substrate on an upper surface thereof and three tubular support arms attached to the substrate support; an upper showerhead assembly supported by a top wall of the vacuum chamber; three openings in an outer wall of the vacuum chamber in which sections of the tubular support arms are located; three actuation mechanisms on the outer wall wherein each actuation mechanism is connected to a respective tubular support arm, the three actuation mechanisms operable to independently move the respective tubular support arms in upward and downward directions to adjust a gap height between the lower electrode and a showerhead electrode distributing gas in the substrate processing apparatus; at least one vacuum port in a bottom wall connected to at least one vacuum pump operable to maintain the vacuum chamber at a predetermined vacuum pressure; and a gas source operable to supply process gas through the upper showerhead assembly to the vacuum chamber.

32. The substrate processing apparatus of claim 31, further comprising a lower electrode assembly incorporated in the substrate support wherein the lower electrode assembly includes a lower electrode.

33. The substrate processing apparatus of claim 32, wherein the lower electrode is coupled to a radio frequency

(RF) power supply via an RF transmission member extending through one of the tubular support arms.

34. The substrate processing apparatus of claim 32, wherein the lower electrode assembly further comprises a temperature controlled base plate.

35. The substrate processing apparatus of claim 31, further comprising an electrostatic chuck (ESC) in the substrate support.

36. The substrate processing apparatus of claim 31, wherein the upper showerhead assembly is an upper showerhead electrode assembly.

37. The substrate processing apparatus of claim 36, including a C-shaped confinement ring positioned about a periphery of the upper showerhead electrode assembly and a lower electrode assembly incorporated in the substrate support within the vacuum chamber, the C-shaped confinement ring enclosing substantially all of an inter-electrode volume between the upper showerhead electrode assembly and the lower electrode assembly and comprising a plurality of openings, each of the openings extending substantially a length of an inter-electrode gap between a plasma exposed surface of the upper showerhead electrode assembly and the upper surface of the substrate support and facilitating gas exhaustion from the inter-electrode volume to the remaining volume of the vacuum chamber.

38. The substrate processing apparatus of claim 31, wherein an expandable vacuum seal seals each opening in the outer wall and maintains a vacuum tight seal between an outer periphery of each tubular support arm and the outer wall such that each tubular support arm may be moved by the respective actuation mechanism without exposing the interior of the vacuum chamber to atmospheric pressure.

39. The substrate processing apparatus of claim 31, wherein the three actuation mechanisms are independently controllable with respect to each other to effect a predetermined gap height between a lower surface of the upper showerhead assembly and the upper surface of the substrate support and a predetermined planarization of the upper surface of the substrate support.

40. The substrate processing apparatus of claim 39, wherein each actuation mechanism comprises a stepper motor coupled to a mount on the outer wall of the vacuum chamber, the mount affixed to the respective tubular support arm such that the tubular support arm is movably located in the respective opening in the outer wall of the vacuum chamber.

41. The substrate processing apparatus of claim 31, wherein the three actuation mechanisms are located on a top surface of the top wall of the vacuum chamber.

42. The substrate processing apparatus of claim 31, wherein the three actuation mechanisms are located on a bottom surface of the bottom wall of the vacuum chamber.

43. The substrate processing apparatus of claim 31, wherein the vacuum chamber includes two vacuum ports in the bottom wall of the vacuum chamber, the bottom wall being separated from the substrate support by an open area, the vacuum ports being connected to two vacuum pumps configured to remove gases from the interior of the vacuum chamber.

44. The substrate processing apparatus of claim 31, wherein one or more of the tubular support arms includes one or more service conduits extending therethrough, the service conduits supplying at least one of a heat transfer gas, temperature controlled liquid coolant, RF energy, pressurized air, electrical monitoring signals or electrical actuating signals to or from the substrate support.

45. The substrate processing apparatus of claim 33, wherein only the RF transmission member is located in one of the tubular support arms, and service conduits for supplying at least one of a heat transfer gas, temperature controlled liquid, pressurized air, electrical monitoring signals, or electrical actuating signals to or from the substrate support are located in one or more of the other tubular support arms.

46. The substrate processing apparatus of claim 31, wherein the vacuum chamber includes a cylindrical inner wall with three vertical channels extending into the cylindrical inner wall, the tubular support arms located in and movable in the vertical channels.

47. The substrate processing apparatus according to claim 31, further including a control system in electrical communication with said actuation mechanisms operable to control gap height between a lower surface of the upper showerhead assembly and the upper surface of the substrate support and planarization of the upper surface of the substrate support.

48. The substrate processing apparatus of claim 47, further comprising at least one laser interferometer, the at least one laser interferometer providing signals to the control system to effect real time measurements of the gap height between the lower surface of the upper showerhead assembly and the upper surface of the substrate support and the planarization of the upper surface of the substrate support.

49. The substrate processing apparatus of claim 48, wherein the control system controls the actuation mechanisms to adjust in-situ, gap height and planarization between the lower surface of the upper showerhead assembly and the upper surface of the substrate support to effectuate uniform processing of the substrate based on the measurements taken by the at least one laser interferometer.

50. The substrate processing apparatus of claim 31, wherein the substrate processing apparatus is a deposition apparatus or a plasma etching apparatus.

51. The substrate processing apparatus of claim 31, wherein the substrate processing apparatus is a capacitively coupled plasma processing apparatus.

52. The substrate processing apparatus of claim 31 wherein each of the tubular support arms is configured to engage via a mounting arrangement with the respective actuation mechanism and wherein each mounting arrangement includes a ball in contact with a different geometric shape.

53. A method of processing a substrate in a substrate processing apparatus, the method comprising: placing a substrate on a support surface of a substrate support inside a vacuum chamber; vertically moving the substrate support to achieve a predetermined gap height between an upper surface of the substrate and a lower surface of an upper showerhead assembly; measuring planarization between the upper surface of the substrate and the lower surface of the upper showerhead assembly to determine if a desired planarization between the upper surface of the substrate and the lower surface of the upper showerhead assembly exists; adjusting in-situ the planarization of the substrate relative to the lower surface of the upper showerhead assembly by raising or lowering one or more of three actuation mechanisms respectively coupled to three support arms of the substrate support by kinematic mounting arrangements to adjust tilt, pitch and elevation of the support surface; supplying a gas into the vacuum chamber from a gas supply; and processing the substrate.

54. The method of claim 53, further comprising energizing the gas into a plasma state and etching the substrate with the plasma.

55. The method of claim 53, further comprising adjusting in-situ the planarization of the substrate during processing.

56. The method of claim 53, wherein the in-situ planarization is measured by at least one sensor which measures gap height and planarization before processing or during processing.

57. The method of claim 53, wherein the three actuation mechanisms are located outside the vacuum chamber and the three support arms extend through expandable vacuum seals, the planarization being effected by moving the support arms while maintaining a desired vacuum pressure inside the vacuum chamber.

58. The method of claim 53, further comprising reducing a pressure in the vacuum chamber to below 500 mTorr before processing the substrate and adjusting the planarization of the substrate prior to processing the substrate after the pressure in the vacuum chamber has been reduced to below 500 mTorr.

59. The method of claim 53, wherein the processing is a deposition process.

60. The method of claim 53, wherein the measuring comprises providing signals to a control system from at least one laser interferometer to effect real time measurements of gap height and planarization between the lower surface of the upper showerhead assembly and the upper surface of the substrate and/or the upper surface of the substrate support.

61. The method of claim 60, further comprising controlling the respective actuation mechanisms with the control system to adjust in-situ, gap height and planarization between the lower surface of the upper showerhead assembly and the upper surface of the substrate to effectuate uniform processing of the substrate based on the measurements taken by the at least one laser interferometer.

62. The method of claim 53, further comprising controlling the respective actuation mechanisms with a control system to adjust in-situ, gap height and planarization between the lower surface of the upper showerhead assembly and the upper surface of the substrate.

63. A substrate support of a substrate processing apparatus comprising: a substrate support configured to support a substrate on an upper surface thereof; and three tubular support arms attached to the substrate support, each of the tubular support arms configured to engage with a respective actuation mechanism operable to effect gap height and planarization adjustment of the substrate support, wherein the three tubular support arms each include a first section extending radially outward from an outer periphery of the substrate support and a second section extending vertically from the first section.

64. A substrate support of a substrate processing apparatus comprising: a substrate support configured to support a substrate on an upper surface thereof; and three tubular support arms attached to the substrate support, each of the tubular support arms configured to engage with a respective actuation mechanism operable to effect gap height and planarization adjustment of the substrate support, wherein the substrate support has a plenum and three radially extending bores extending between the plenum and an outer periphery of the substrate support wherein each of the tubular support arms defines a passage that is in communication with a respective bore.

65. A substrate processing apparatus comprising: a vacuum chamber; a substrate support in an interior of the vacuum chamber wherein the substrate support is config-

ured to support a substrate on an upper surface thereof and three tubular support arms attached to the substrate support; an upper showerhead assembly supported by a top wall of the vacuum chamber; three openings in an outer wall of the vacuum chamber in which sections of the tubular support arms are located; three actuation mechanisms on the outer wall wherein each actuation mechanism is connected to a respective tubular support arm, the three actuation mechanisms operable to independently move the respective tubular support arms in upward and downward directions; at least one vacuum port in a bottom wall connected to at least one vacuum pump operable to maintain the vacuum chamber at a predetermined vacuum pressure; and a gas source operable to supply process gas through the upper showerhead assembly to the vacuum chamber, wherein an expandable vacuum seal seals each opening in the outer wall and maintains a vacuum tight seal between an outer periphery of each tubular support arm and the outer wall such that each tubular support arm may be moved by the respective actuation mechanism without exposing the interior of the vacuum chamber to atmospheric pressure.

66. A substrate processing apparatus comprising: a vacuum chamber; a substrate support in an interior of the vacuum chamber wherein the substrate support is configured to support a substrate on an upper surface thereof and three tubular support arms attached to the substrate support; an upper showerhead assembly supported by a top wall of the vacuum chamber; three openings in an outer wall of the vacuum chamber in which sections of the tubular support arms are located; three actuation mechanisms on the outer wall wherein each actuation mechanism is connected to a respective tubular support arm, the three actuation mechanisms operable to independently move the respective tubular support arms in upward and downward directions; at least one vacuum port in a bottom wall connected to at least one vacuum pump operable to maintain the vacuum chamber at a predetermined vacuum pressure; and a gas source operable to supply process gas through the upper showerhead assembly to the vacuum chamber, wherein the three actuation mechanisms are located on a top surface of the top wall of the vacuum chamber.

67. A substrate processing apparatus comprising: a vacuum chamber; a substrate support in an interior of the vacuum chamber wherein the substrate support is configured to support a substrate on an upper surface thereof and three tubular support arms attached to the substrate support; an upper showerhead assembly supported by a top wall of the vacuum chamber; three openings in an outer wall of the vacuum chamber in which sections of the tubular support arms are located; three actuation mechanisms on the outer wall wherein each actuation mechanism is connected to a respective tubular support arm, the three actuation mechanisms operable to independently move the respective tubular support arms in upward and downward directions; at least one vacuum port in a bottom wall connected to at least one vacuum pump operable to maintain the vacuum chamber at a predetermined vacuum pressure; and a gas source operable to supply process gas through the upper showerhead assembly to the vacuum chamber, wherein one or more of the tubular support arms includes one or more service conduits extending therethrough, the service conduits supplying at least one of a heat transfer gas, temperature controlled liquid coolant, RF energy, pressurized air, electrical monitoring signals or electrical actuating signals to or from the substrate support.

68. A substrate processing apparatus comprising: a vacuum chamber; a substrate support in an interior of the

vacuum chamber wherein the substrate support is configured to support a substrate on an upper surface thereof and three tubular support arms attached to the substrate support; an upper showerhead assembly supported by a top wall of the vacuum chamber; three openings in an outer wall of the vacuum chamber in which sections of the tubular support arms are located; three actuation mechanisms on the outer wall wherein each actuation mechanism is connected to a respective tubular support arm, the three actuation mechanisms operable to independently move the respective tubular support arms in upward and downward directions; at least one vacuum port in a bottom wall connected to at least one vacuum pump operable to maintain the vacuum chamber at a predetermined vacuum pressure; a gas source operable to supply process gas through the upper showerhead assembly to the vacuum chamber; and a lower electrode assembly incorporated in the substrate support wherein the lower electrode assembly includes a lower electrode, wherein the lower electrode is coupled to a radio frequency (RF) power supply via an RF transmission member extending through one of the tubular support arms.

69. A substrate processing apparatus comprising: a vacuum chamber; a substrate support in an interior of the vacuum chamber wherein the substrate support is configured to support a substrate on an upper surface thereof and three tubular support arms attached to the substrate support; an upper showerhead assembly supported by a top wall of the vacuum chamber; three openings in an outer wall of the vacuum chamber in which sections of the tubular support arms are located; three actuation mechanisms on the outer wall wherein each actuation mechanism is connected to a respective tubular support arm, the three actuation mechanisms operable to independently move the respective tubular support arms in upward and downward directions; at least one vacuum port in a bottom wall connected to at least one vacuum pump operable to maintain the vacuum chamber at a predetermined vacuum pressure; and a gas source operable to supply process gas through the upper showerhead assembly to the vacuum chamber, wherein the upper showerhead assembly is an upper showerhead electrode assembly, including a C-shaped confinement ring positioned about a periphery of the upper showerhead electrode assembly and a lower electrode assembly incorporated in the substrate support within the vacuum chamber, the C-shaped confinement ring enclosing substantially all of an inter-electrode volume between the upper showerhead electrode assembly and the lower electrode assembly and comprising a plurality of openings, each of the openings extending substantially a length of an inter-electrode gap between a plasma exposed surface of the upper showerhead electrode assembly and the upper surface of the substrate support and facilitating gas exhaustion from the inter-electrode volume to the remaining volume of the vacuum chamber.

70. A substrate processing apparatus comprising: a vacuum chamber; a substrate support in an interior of the vacuum chamber wherein the substrate support is configured to support a substrate on an upper surface thereof and three tubular support arms attached to the substrate support; an upper showerhead assembly supported by a top wall of the vacuum chamber; three openings in an outer wall of the vacuum chamber in which sections of the tubular support arms are located; three actuation mechanisms on the outer wall wherein each actuation mechanism is connected to a respective tubular support arm, the three actuation mechanisms operable to independently move the respective tubular support arms in upward and downward

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directions; at least one vacuum port in a bottom wall connected to at least one vacuum pump operable to maintain the vacuum chamber at a predetermined vacuum pressure; and a gas source operable to supply process gas through the upper showerhead assembly to the vacuum chamber, wherein the vacuum chamber includes a cylindrical inner wall with three vertical channels extending into the cylindrical inner wall, the tubular support arms located in and movable in the vertical channels.

71. A substrate processing apparatus comprising: a vacuum chamber; a substrate support in an interior of the vacuum chamber wherein the substrate support is configured to support a substrate on an upper surface thereof and three tubular support arms attached to the substrate support; an upper showerhead assembly supported by a top wall of the vacuum chamber; three openings in an outer wall of the vacuum chamber in which sections of the tubular support arms are located; three actuation mechanisms on the outer wall wherein each actuation mechanism is connected to a respective tubular support arm, the three actua-

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tion mechanisms operable to independently move the respective tubular support arms in upward and downward directions; at least one vacuum port in a bottom wall connected to at least one vacuum pump operable to maintain the vacuum chamber at a predetermined vacuum pressure; a gas source operable to supply process gas through the upper showerhead assembly to the vacuum chamber; a control system in electrical communication with said actuation mechanisms operable to control gap height between a lower surface of the upper showerhead assembly and the upper surface of the substrate support and planarization of the upper surface of the substrate support and at least one laser interferometer, the at least one laser interferometer providing signals to the control system to effect real time measurements of the gap height between the lower surface of the upper showerhead assembly and the upper surface of the substrate support and the planarization of the upper surface of the substrate support.

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