

## WASHINGTON NEWS

### S&T Appropriations on Another Roller-Coaster Ride

Congress seems headed for one final wrangle with the Clinton administration over funding levels for basic science and technology (S&T) research programs, as the two sides approach the election season far apart on this appropriations issue. Furthermore, the wide gap between funding levels proposed by the White House and Congress nearly guarantees that the final amounts will be something less than the generous levels contained in the administration's FY 2001 budget requests.

Last February, the White House requested a \$583 million increase in the National Science Foundation's (NSF's) research and development (R&D) budget, a 19.8% increase. But the appropriations bill currently in the House authorizes \$178 million more than last year's for NSF-sponsored R&D in FY 2001, or a 6% increase. Although this is much less than the White House request, it nevertheless exceeds annual funding growth over the past several years.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration budget currently is taking an even bigger hit from Congress. Although the White House request for NASA's R&D budget for FY 2001 was a relatively modest increase—\$263 million, or 2.7%—the House appropriations bill actually slashed \$60 million, which if final would result in a 0.6% decrease.

Another potential budget casualty is the Department of Energy's (DOE's) Spallation Neutron Source (SNS). Congressional appropriators have earmarked only \$130 million in funding for SNS next year, while DOE had requested \$214 million.

The only R&D-related agency currently benefiting from the divergence between Congress and the White House is the Department of Defense (DoD). Congress seems determined to hand DoD modest R&D funding increases, whereas the White House had requested cuts. If the congressional numbers hold, DoD's total R&D funding next year should increase by about 4%, with the biggest increment going to the Basic Research (6.1) category—perhaps as much as 11.5%.

Despite this divergence in funding priorities, there are some grounds for optimism. Appropriations-watchers both in Congress and the administration predict that the final R&D numbers will fall fairly close to, but not match exactly, the original White House proposals.

Only a few of the R&D funding reductions made by Congress to date have been due to opposition to specific programs. Indeed, there is broad support in Congress for boosting S&T research funding. Last

May, a bipartisan coalition of 12 senators, led by Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-CT), wrote to the leaders of both the Senate Appropriations Committee and all six subcommittees, urging them to honor the commitment to double the annual federal investment in S&T over the next decade.

"Shortchanging science in this year's appropriations process would be worrisome since much of our current economic success results from past federal investment made in basic research," according to the letter. "We understand the constraints facing you in this year's appropriations process. However, we believe that Congress has a responsibility to ensure our nation's continued prosperity through investment in research."

Perhaps more important, the sentiments by Sen. Lieberman and his colleagues were echoed in a companion letter sent to Senate appropriators by the Council on Competitiveness, a coalition of 47 leaders from the academic and business communities. The Council's letter noted that if federal investments in science decline, "so too does the pool of technically trained talent, forcing industry and academia to look abroad for skilled knowledge workers." According to Senate staffers, the Council's letter was "unprecedented," and is being taken very seriously among appropriations leaders.

Instead of disagreements over research priorities or specific programs—as Congress and the White House have experienced in recent years—the source of conflict this time is the size of the total federal budget for discretionary (non-entitlement) spending that includes all R&D items. The White House had requested \$622 billion for FY 2001, while Congress is pushing for a level of around \$605 billion. That missing \$17 billion required Congress to trim a bit of FY 2001 discretionary spending, and so far, nondefense R&D programs have suffered their share of the belt-tightening.

As the process continues, however, appropriations analysts expect Congress to free up more money, and as a result, most of the administration's R&D requests probably will be restored.

Recent history suggests that this year's federal budget is following a familiar pattern. One veteran budget analyst, Kei Koizumi of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, explains the progression: "This year is exactly the same scenario as last year. The President requested so much for R&D. But Congress came back with smaller amounts. All summer long, the two sides went back and forth. It became a big mess. Finally, the President won, and most of the agencies got what they requested. This year,

because of the election, it all may happen sooner. Even the Republicans admit it."

PHIL BERARDELLI

### Alan Balutis Heads Advanced Technology Program

In April, the Commerce Department announced that Alan P. Balutis, a 21-year veteran with the department, was named director of the National Institute of Standards and Technology's Advanced Technology Program (NIST, ATP). Balutis replaces Lura Powell, who directed the program from 1995 until her retirement in September 1999.

In his most recent position at DOC, Balutis was responsible for information-technology management and supervised a budget of over \$1.1 billion. He created the first major IT-systems oversight board in the government. He has held several key positions, including director of the Office of Systems and Special Projects (1983–84); director of the Office of Management and Organization (1984–87); director for Budget, Planning, and Organization (1987–94); and director for Budget, Management, and Information.

The ATP provides cost-shared funding to industry-led research and development (R&D) projects that are selected for their innovation, risk, and potential broad impact on the economy. The ATP currently manages a portfolio of more than 200 research projects.

### Report Assesses Status of K–12 Education in Science and Math

The Council of Chief State School Officers released a report assessing K–12 student achievement in science and math in the United States. In a study supported by the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Council found that during the period of 1990 to 1998, high school students have been graduating with an increasing number of courses in science and math. The study, in cooperation with state departments of education, examined state-by-state trends in student achievement, content and instruction, teacher preparation and supply, and context and conditions of teaching.

Among the report's findings is that the national percentage of high school students taking three years of science shows an increase from 45% to 54% between 1990 and 1998. During the same period, the report shows the percentage of high school students taking three years of math to be up from 49% to 63%. The report also finds that teacher preparation and supply varies widely by state. □