

**Upbeat Outlook for DOE Materials Research Despite New Year's Uncertainty**

In a typical budget cycle, U.S. federal agencies spend the fall examining their next year's budgets and negotiating with the White House and the Office of Budget Management such that the President can present a request by February, eight months before that budget goes into effect.

Not this time.

As 1996 rolled in, Republicans in the U.S. Congress and President Clinton were still at an impasse over the FY 1996 budget, which was due to start October 1, 1995. The stalemate was rooted in arguments about how to balance the federal budget in the coming decade. But as the first year in that effort, the appropriations for FY 1996 proved exceptionally contentious, so much so that the White House and Congress could not even come to temporary consensus about whether to keep federal workers at their jobs when the laws that funded these jobs were still in limbo. Materials research programs have been affected by this uncertainty, but no more and no less than have other programs.

Prior to a November stalemate, the President had signed just six spending bills. Among them was H.R. 1905, the Energy and Water Development Appropriations Act, 1996, which provided \$19.3 billion for programs of the Department of Energy (DOE), portions of the Departments of Interior and Defense, the Army Corps of Engineers, and several smaller agencies.

A closer look at materials research in DOE at the dawn of the new year shows just how targeted cuts have been, but that in general the materials community fared well considering the budget-slicing mood in Washington.

All but 5% of the money requested for the conceptual design of a spallation neutron source was allocated. Over the next 12 months, Oak Ridge National Laboratory will draw up a plan on the approach, schedule, and cost for this project, which will eventually provide neutrons useful for the study of properties of materials.

Likewise, the DOE facilities initiative, which provides DOE support for reactors, synchrotrons, and electron microscopes, still sustained a substantial increase. Though not the \$57 million

requested, it received about \$50 million.

However, two other new, supposedly key programs did not fare nearly as well. Both the Environmental Technologies Partnership and the Partnership for a New Generation of Vehicles (PNGV) lost about half their DOE funding and will have to start on a smaller scale than originally anticipated, said Iran Thomas, director of materials science at DOE.

Even so, if some bills still pending as *MRS Bulletin* goes to press pass as planned, the PNGV should have about \$200 million, according to Pandit G. Patil of the DOE Office of Energy Efficiency. That office has some \$30 million to support research in advanced automotive materials. The basic research for the PNGV is handled through Thomas's office, which should have about \$5 million for that program to award this year to outside institutions.

Clinton considered the facilities program a "key science initiative" to enhance the operation of DOE science facilities and make them more accessible to other researchers. Part of the funding will enable DOE facilities to operate at their optimum capacity and address the needs of academic, government, and industrial scientists frustrated by the lack of adequate funding for these facilities, Thomas said.

The rest, \$113 million, became available for upgrading old instruments or purchasing new ones. DOE labs competed for one pool of this money. For the rest, the request for proposals could not go out in early fall as planned because of the delayed passage of H.R. 1905, so universities, companies, and other institutions had only about a month to submit their requests.

Thus, although the basic research program for materials in DOE, with \$128 million for 1996, remained about the same as in 1995, "From the standpoint of the overall budget, we did very well," Thomas said.

ELIZABETH PENNISI

**Workshop On Moisture in Microelectronics Seeks Papers**

Electronic engineers, materials scientists, designers, and others engaged in the development and manufacture of microelectronic products are invited to submit papers for the 6th International Workshop on Moisture in Microelectronics, October 15-17, 1996. The workshop will be held at the Commerce Department's National Institute of Standards and Technology,

Gaithersburg, Maryland. It is being cosponsored by NIST and the U.S. Air Force Rome Laboratory, Rome, New York.

Prospective authors are requested to submit a 100 to 150 word abstract by **March 1, 1996.**

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**Report from White House Details Success of Federal R&D Investments**

In the White House November 1995 report "Technology and Economic Growth: Producing Real Results for the American People," President Clinton cited numerous instances in materials research to exemplify successes of federal investment in long-term research and development projects. He refers to the October 1995 report produced by the Council of Economic Advisers (CEA), "Supporting Research and Development to Promote Economic Growth: The Federal Government's Role," which details economic returns of federal investment in R&D, and precommercial R&D in particular. Precommercial R&D is defined as the step between basic research and product commercialization. The CEA report said, "Government support of such precommercial R&D involves identifying, with the aid of scientists, engineers, entrepreneurs, economists, and business people, technologies that could yield large societal benefits but may not necessarily yield much private return to the innovator."

Both reports list societal benefits of advances made in semiconductor microelectronics, computers, lasers, magnetic resonance imaging, and advanced materials and composites due to federal defense and nondefense R&D investments. The White House report further details the successes of such government programs as the Advanced Technology Program, the Manufacturing Extension Partnership, and the Technology Reinvestment Project. □

1996 MRS Spring Meeting Preregistration Deadline is March 22, 1996.  
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