

plot was cheating on his cotton allotment, and project personnel had been deliberately misled. In another instance, a farmer who complained that insecticides applied in the test project had killed some of his cattle and chickens refused to allow project personnel on his place until the state entomologist threatened legal action against him.

The problems that would be associated with a beltwide eradication program do not stop with those just cited. The fact that the boll weevil would have a sanctuary in Mexico means that there would have to be a never-ending

battle against the pest in South Texas. Unless those weevils that fly across the Rio Grande into Texas are quickly suppressed, they could again spread from there into other parts of the cotton belt.

Also, there are several alternate host plants, the most important of which is *cienfuegosia*, a wild cotton plant that grows in scattered colonies over a vast area along the South Texas coast. All colonies would have to be found and any weevil infestations suppressed. *Althea*, a hibiscus plant found throughout the South in home gardens, may also

harbor the weevil unless homeowners can be persuaded to stop growing it. Besides the alternate hosts, there is the problem of volunteer cotton (which can spring up in fallow fields) and ornamental cotton, the latter sometimes grown by operators of roadside businesses to attract Yankee tourists. All such volunteer and ornamental plants would have to be eliminated.

Whatever the potential difficulties, the National Cotton Council, eagerly pressing on, presented an overall plan for boll weevil eradication to Secretary of Agriculture Earl L. Butz in Decem-

Proxmire Hits NSF Research Priorities, Funding Flexibility

When officials of the National Science Foundation (NSF) went to Congress in December to ask for \$8.2 million in supplemental funding for their \$566.6 million fiscal 1974 appropriation, they got a taste of what it is like to be grilled by the cost-conscious senator from Wisconsin, William Proxmire, who is chairman of an appropriations subcommittee overseeing NSF.

The supplemental money was intended for some new expenses in connection with the Administration's energy program and the new science policy office that is to assist NSF Director H. Guyford Stever. But Proxmire used the occasion to question a range of agency programs, some of which are dear to NSF. The senator's staff confirms that the approach taken in the 2 December hearing is the one he intends to follow when the entire NSF budget for 1975 comes before him this year.

Proxmire's authority over the NSF budget stems from his chairmanship of the Subcommittee on Housing and Urban Development, Space, and Science of the Senate Appropriations Committee—which oversees appropriations for NSF, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and some smaller agencies. NSF is something of a dwarf compared with HUD and NASA, each of which has a budget over \$3 billion. But Proxmire obviously thinks fiscal waste can be cleansed from any budget—large or small.

NSF officials say that, despite his reputation as a maverick in the Senate, Proxmire has treated them fairly in the year and a half he has been chairman. Indeed, after the 3-hour hearing on the supplemental funds, he followed the House's lead and merely cut the request by \$400,000 to \$7.8 million.

During the hearing, however, he queried NSF Director Stever and Assistant Director for Research Applications Alfred J. Eggers, and other officials. Instead of encouraging NSF's applied projects outside of basic science, Proxmire argued that many of them seem to belong more properly under the jurisdiction of other agencies. Citing a \$900,000 automotive propulsion project under the program of Research Applied to National Needs, he asked whether or not the auto industry was funding similar work and declared, "I fail at this time

to see a place for the National Science Foundation." Proxmire went down a specific list of projects in fields from history to transportation, asking why they weren't being sponsored by other agencies.

Stever, Eggers, and others argued that NSF's perspective on these problems was different from that of other, mission-oriented agencies. Defending the automotive propulsion project, Eggers noted that they had found only 100 university experts in the field in the country—hence they funded the work "primarily" at universities.

It is relevant to ask, in addition, how basic science fared with the senator. Only one such project was included in the supplemental funds—\$3.1 million for ultrasonic imaging—and it received, at best, cursory treatment from Proxmire. Like other politicians in the past, Proxmire seemed to take NSF at its word when it comes to basic science.

Proxmire also extracted a promise from Stever that he would look into the unspent \$300,000 that NSF set aside a year ago for the Presidential Prizes for Innovation, and report back to him. And, as to the NSF director's new function as Science Adviser to the President, Proxmire was equally skeptical after totaling up the cost: "Whereas we were told that the abolition of the Office of Science and Technology would save \$2 million, it is actually costing the taxpayer \$4.5 million. . . ."

Perhaps the most important sign in the sky for NSF's future was Proxmire's decision, after the hearing, that there should be greater congressional control of NSF's ability to transfer funds within its budget and alter its research priorities. "The Committee desires to put the . . . Foundation on notice," said the subsequent committee report, "that, in the consideration of the budget estimate for fiscal year 1975, it contemplates placing the programs of the Foundation on a line-item basis. . . ." NSF officials admit that itemizing their appropriations would limit the considerable flexibility NSF now has for fund transfers. Whether Proxmire will try to control the foundation in this way depends on the outcome of a committee study of the subject he has ordered. However, his inclinations are clear.—DEBORAH SHAPLEY