# Briefing

## Ford Budget Axe Cuts Research

President Ford on 26 November proposed to reduce federal spending by $4.6 billion in ways that would put a special squeeze on the research community. The President wants to take $300 million out of the current fiscal year, 1975, civilian R & D budget as part of his program of fiscal restraint.

Significantly, the $300 million represents approximately 6 percent of the total cuts proposed, whereas civilian R & D makes up only 3 percent of the total federal budget. No reductions were proposed in the $8.6 billion military R & D budget.

It is too soon to tell whether the Democratic Congress, reinforced by the election results, will go along with the President's proposed package of cuts and expenditure deferrals. If it should, however, the National Institutes of Health would be hardest hit, losing $112.1 million or 25 percent of new grants and 5 percent of ongoing grants in the remainder of the fiscal year. Also reduced would be funds for the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia, for special project grants in the health manpower field, and for the budget of the Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration.

The Ford Administration is on record backing development of alternative energy sources, but the new budget proposal would take $80 million away from reactor development, including work on the liquid metal fast breeder reactor, the molten salt-breeder reactor, and the high temperature gas-cooled reactor. Controlled thermonuclear and laser fusion programs would also be partially deferred.

The President also proposed deferring $72 million of the current budget of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, including part of the joint U.S.-U.S.S.R. docking mission, the NIMBUS G pollution monitoring satellite, the Pioneer-Venus probes, the TIROS N weather satellite, and other research and technology programs. The National Science Foundation would have $20 million deferred, including funds for solar and geothermal energy research, institutional support, and for the RANN (Research Applied to National Needs) program. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's budget for facilities and construction, as well as a fisheries survey in the Gulf of Mexico, Atlantic, and Pacific would be deferred. The budget of the National Bureau of Standards would be reduced by $3.7 million.

These and other research cuts are part of no less than 135 separate actions Ford requested. There is enough confusion in the affected agencies as to how to implement them; at NIH, for example, grant and contract awards are being temporarily held up until the situation is clarified. In Congress too, there is some dispute as to whether the usual committees should respond to the Ford initiatives or whether they should be reviewed by the new budget committees. But even if these proposals are blocked by the Congress, the Administration could try to implement them again when it submits its proposed fiscal 1976 budget in January.—D.S.

## Son of Deep Throat Foils Physicists

Fearful that *Physical Review Letters* might refuse to publish word about their discovery of two extraordinary new particles if newspapers heard about it first, physicists at Stanford, Berkeley, Brookhaven, and MIT tried their very best to keep the story secret for 3 weeks in November. Their plan was to hold it up for the *PRL*'s 2 December issue, but an intrepid student journalist on the Berkeley campus put the plan awry.

William Link, a science writer for the *Daily Californian*, isn't telling who leaked it to him, but he says he heard the story after one of the discreet seminars exultant physicists were holding on the two Bay Area campuses. Link verified the story and broke it on 15 November in the campus paper. Students, Link observes, "are notorious blabbermouths."

But it all ended happily. Somewhat coyly, a *PRL* official said the journal decided in this case to bend its rules against prepublication.

—R.G. and W.D.M.

new questions and have opened gaps into which fellow scholars have rushed headlong. If it is assumed that the statistics are not only correct but representative of the population, the critics ask, aren't there other ways to explain the surprisingly advanced age of primiparous women? One theory explored at the Rochester conference was that slave women experienced late menarche. This idea is implausible if the authors' theories about the slave diet hold true, because female fertility is dependent on adequate nutrition. (The possibility that abortion might have been widely practiced was not even discussed.)

These isolated examples illustrate the pitfalls of trying to reconstruct an "objective" account of an historical phenomenon, especially when most of the variables relate to human nature. Value judgments masquerade as logical inferences, and one small logical inconsistency can skew results as badly as a misplaced decimal point. The more one attempts to deal in pure rationality, it seems, the more room there is for emotional judgments to slither in, not only unquantified but unrecognized.

While many cliometricians call *Time on the Cross* an important book, many also express surprise and dismay that two such respected scholars could engage in what they see as flagrant abuse of their methodology.

Paul David of Stanford, one of the original "Young Turks," calls it a "sloppy, shoddy" piece of work. He finds himself appalled by the "intimidating" presentation by the authors, the "mystification" of the scientific approach, and the "dreadful" model for scholarship the book supplies for tender graduate students who might make the mistake of liking it. He says these qualities have forced scholardom to give the book much more attention than it deserves. In fact, David and four colleagues are actually putting together a book-length critique just to show how bad *Time on the Cross* is.

Anyone untrained in statistics is helpless when it comes to judging the validity of the book's conclusions, and Fogel claims that even many econometricians don't seem to understand the reasoning. Because the findings are so surprising, he says, critics automatically suspect the methods, and "every time we don't give a procedure it is assumed we did the wrong procedure."

Fogel and Engerman originally