Letters

Supercomputer Funding

Colin Norman's excellent coverage (News and Comment, 8 June, p. 1075) of the $7 million included in the Department of Energy budget for a supercomputer center at Florida State University omits one pertinent fact.

According to the article, "[t]he heart of [Florida State's] facility would be a so-called class VII supercomputer currently under development by ETA Systems" that would be used "to develop the software for scientific research on supercomputers."

The article does not note, however, that a center for exactly that purpose is already in operation in the Advanced Computational Methods Center (ACMC) at the University of Georgia. ETA Systems, which Control Data spun off to create the 10-gigaflop GF-10, has already located its Supercomputer Applications Laboratory on this campus. The applications and software development division of ETA Systems will use the Cyber 205 in this center to create the GF-10 and to develop both scientific and industrial applications of parallel processor technology. What is more, Control Data is donating to the center the first CyberPlus to be produced in their own laboratories. The University of Georgia was chosen because of our nearly two decades of leadership in software development and our expertise in parallel processing algorithm design.

The University of Georgia's ACMC already exists. It already has a Cyber 205. It is already developing software for scientific research on supercomputers, with on-site collaboration from ETA Systems. It would not make sense to spend $7 million initially and $55 million over 10 years to start from scratch, at Florida State, to build what already exists at the University of Georgia. Such a duplication of effort would waste not only taxpayers' dollars but valuable time and effort.

Additional funding for scientific research involving supercomputers is essential, but it should be allocated to those best qualified as determined by the peer review process. The designation of Florida State is counter to this principle and to our nation's best interests.

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Cancer Advisory Board

The 1982 and 1984 appointments to the National Cancer Advisory Board (NCAB) by President Reagan strengthen science and applied science in the National Cancer Program (NCP). They also strengthen the board's mission to carry out its responsibility to guide and advise the National Cancer Institute (NCI) to fulfill the intent of Congress: to improve the quality and longevity of life by acquisition of new knowledge through basic biomedical research, clinical research, and promotion of that knowledge through technology transfer.

The landmark National Cancer Act of 1971 was followed by more than a decade of great discoveries in cancer biology, etiology, and treatment. The taxpayers have supported this effort with $10.7 billion during the past 12 years. This is a sizable increase over the budget of the previous 33 years (1938 to 1971), when a total of $2.3 billion was spent. These recent discoveries and the information obtained have provided many practical benefits to cancer prevention and treatment and have contributed to the gradual increase in U.S. cancer survival.

This year NCI has developed a long-range plan to decrease cancer mortality by another 50 percent by the year 2000. The NCAB members actively and enthusiastically support this achievable goal. Annual cancer deaths would be reduced by 288,000 in 2000. A 20 percent reduction would come from prevention by behavioral modification (diet modification, 5 percent; smoking cessation, 15 percent). The major part of the reduction (30 percent) would come from improved diagnosis and treatment resulting from technology available now and the results of research in progress.

During 1983 and 1984, board members have been encouraging the expansion and reorganization of the Organ Systems Program. This program can play an important role in the achievement of the year 2000 goal, as it brings together basic and clinical scientists to generate progress in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of the most frequent cancers. In the past, emphasis was placed on the less frequent cancers that were more responsive to chemotherapy.

Research in the basic sciences of chemistry and biology has received much emphasis in the NCP. Now the physical sciences and technology that changed the world around us are beginning to receive more attention. Research facilities for applying computers to deal with the vast amount of research and treatment information are becoming available through NCI for use by researchers and practicing physicians. Surgical science, which is a form of physical technology, is receiving special emphasis through a new ad hoc Board Subcommittee on Innovations in Surgical Oncology. This subcommittee will be instrumental in bringing new ideas and emphasis to the application of emerging high technology in extra- and intraoperative diagnosis and surgical removal of localized and multiple metastatic cancers.

Another new ad hoc subcommittee addresses the research and treatment problems of decreasing the greater cancer mortality in the black population.

Members of the NCAB and the President's Cancer Panel are communicating more openly with the basic and clinical research communities and also with the leadership of the NCI. This interaction is contributing to the fulfillment of the original goals set by the National Cancer Act of 1971.

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Correction

The article "Reagan seeks expansion of Soviet ties" by R. Jeffrey Smith (News and Comment, 13 July, p. 145) erroneously stated that the U.S. Senate had passed a resolution calling for a U.S.–Soviet summit "without preconditions or assurances of success." Shortly before midnight on 19 June, the resolution was amended to call for a summit at "the earliest practical time following thorough preparation." It was approved in this form.