

Northwestern Seeks a Federal Lab

Northwestern University and the city of Evanston, Illinois, want the federal government to establish a national laboratory on a plot of land close to the university's campus. The facility would be the centerpiece of an ambitious \$400-million project to attract high-tech industry into the area. Thanks to support from Evanston's congressman, Representative Sidney Yates (D-Ill.), they are close to getting what they want.

Last month, the House of Representatives approved a bill containing \$26 million for a Basic Industry Research Laboratory on the Evanston site. The bill, which provides funds to the Department of Interior and some programs in the Department of Energy (DOE), was written by an appropriations subcommittee chaired by Yates. According to the committee's report on the legislation, the lab would be funded by DOE's conservation program and it would "perform research and training in manufacturing, material, mineral and environmental technologies with the purpose of increasing energy efficiency in manufacturing and the conservation of energy resources by these industries."

If the proposal makes it all the way through Congress, DOE could have problems fitting the facility into its current programs. The proposal has not gone through the usual review process and it was, of course, not conceived as an integral part of DOE's energy conservation activities. Thus, grafting it on to an existing program may not be easy. More important, although the \$26 million in the House bill is supposed to cover the cost of constructing and equipping the lab, DOE is likely to be faced with a heavy bill in future years for operating costs. Unless the conservation budget grows enough to accommodate this increased commitment, other research would end up being squeezed.

The scope of the lab's activities will clearly be much broader than energy conservation. According to William I. Ihlanfeldt, vice president for institutional relations at Northwestern, it will encompass a spectrum of technologies important to basic industries, and it will act as an interface between the university and private companies. Part of the plan, for example, is that university researchers would work in the lab part of their time.

The facility is envisaged as the key to a science park, a project that the university and the city of Evanston have been planning for some time. The hope is that the combination of the federal lab and Northwestern's expertise in engineering will entice private companies to establish R&D facilities alongside the lab. According to Ihlanfeldt, if the federal facility is built, ground should be broken for all the expected units in the park within 7 years, but without the federal facility it would be a "15- to 20-year project."

Soon after they conceived the idea, university officials sought help from Schlossberg-Cassidy and Associates, a Washington, D.C.-based consulting firm that gained notoriety last year by helping secure funds for some university buildings through pork barrel amendments in Congress. Ihlanfeldt says Schlossberg-Cassidy helped refine the idea and draw up a proposal, but the university itself approached Representative Yates.

Funds for the facility were put into the Interior and Energy appropriations bill, which was approved by the House on 8 August with few people aware of the proposal. The Senate Appropriations Committee has, however, not included funds for the lab in its version of the bill, which is expected to be on the Senate floor in late September. The lab's fate will therefore rest on the outcome of a House-Senate conference committee, which will probably complete its work shortly before Congress adjourns in early October for the elections.

This proposal indicates why the phenomenon of pork barrel politics in relation to university facilities continues unabated in the face of condemnation from just about every academic organization. There are no longer any federal programs to provide university construction funds, and with university research seen as a key to attracting high-tech industry to a region, there are major economic and political incentives for members of Congress to cut some pork for their academic constituents.—COLIN NORMAN

dustry and universities with state and local school authorities to fashion innovative programs, the program is authorized \$60 million in federal funds next year to use on a 50:50 cost-sharing basis with public and private agencies. The partnership scheme emerged in the Senate version and, according to Senate staff sources, the designation of NSF to administer the program was something of a compliment to the foundation, since it was based on the belief that NSF could do the best job of uniting university scientists and public school educators in the effort. The sponsors view the anxieties generated by the procedural requirements as exaggerated. One staff member observed that it is "true that they will have to deal with people they haven't dealt with before," but notes that the legislation was extensively revised to meet what were regarded as "valid concerns" on the part of NSF traditionalists and that no more complaints were registered until "2 days before the vote." Proponents of the partnership felt strongly that it "was necessary to try something different" if the initiative were to succeed.

So long as no funding is provided for the partnerships program, the issue of its administrative impact appears academic. Such is not the case in respect to NSF teacher retraining and educational materials development initiatives, which are mentioned in the new law and for which funds have actually been appropriated.

Sources on Capitol Hill say that the old rules probably apply in the short run, but that the situation is too complicated to allow an easy answer. From NSF, the response to virtually any question on its education program is "no comment." The foundation is still building up the staff of its education directorate which was reestablished early this year after being dismantled early in the Reagan Administration. And it has spent little of the money pressed on it by Congress to aid precollege education. A new assistant director for science and engineering education, Bassam Z. Shakhshiri, took over only early this summer, and the foundation's new director, Erich Bloch, took office early this month. Faced with the task of rebuilding the directorate and at the same time fashioning the basic policies under which it will operate, Shakhshiri has been handing out rain checks to the press.

At this point it is unwise to draw sweeping conclusions from passage of the new law. Not only is the funding outlook bleak, but the circumstances of its enactment were special. It came at a time when a gathering campaign atmo-