

AIDS Amendment Angers Cancer Institute

Just before Congress recessed for the presidential election, it passed an amendment to the Health and Human Services' appropriations bill that added \$14.6 million to the Administration's budget request for research on AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome). The amendment, which was proposed on the floor of the Senate by Alan Cranston (D-Calif.), provides an extra \$11.2 million for the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), \$2.6 million for the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, \$822,000 for the National Institute of Mental Health, and nothing at all for the National Cancer Institute (NCI), where virologists identified the AIDS virus last spring.

Senator Cranston, who sees his amendment as an indication of congressional support for AIDS research, suddenly found himself in the cross fire of an intra-HHS dispute when cancer researchers accused him of favoring other health agencies to the exclusion of the NCI, which has done a great majority of the pioneering work on this deadly and still-spreading disease. Although NCI officials are tight-lipped on the subject, their irritation was expressed for them by members of the cancer community who serve in various advisory capacities. For example, on behalf of the Board of Scientific Counselors of the NCI's cancer etiology division, G. Barry Pierce of the University of Colorado Medical Center wrote Cranston that he was "dismayed" by the Senator's "oversight" in leaving NCI out of the largesse of his amendment.

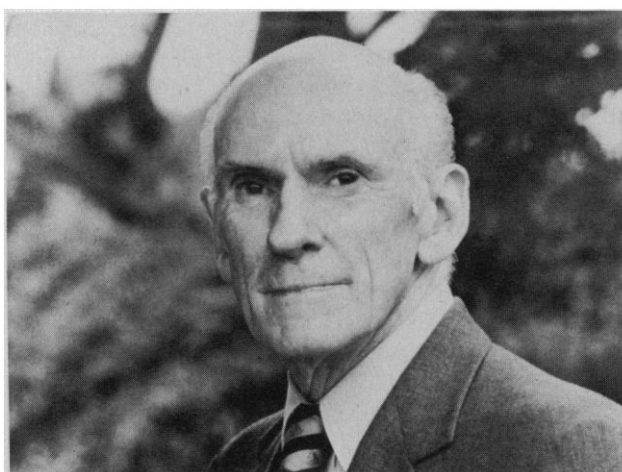
On the one hand, cancer scientists who are not involved in AIDS research were distressed to find NCI denied additional funds because they believe that the money the institute currently is spending on AIDS is money that otherwise would go for other areas of cancer research. In part, this reflects the idea some people have that AIDS isn't really a *cancer* problem at all and, therefore, that whatever NCI spends on it should come from funds separate from the rest of the budget.

On the other hand, AIDS researchers who have NCI support were stunned to see Congress appropriating extra money for research in other health agencies which, they think, are not as much in the forefront as they. That the competitive spirit between NCI scientists and those in the allergy institute and at CDC is alive and well is evident from off-the-record comments about Congress being inveigled to neglect the NCI.

For his part, Cranston, who appears to have been caught in the middle, denies any such intent. In a response to Pierce he laid responsibility at the feet of HHS officials whose budget recommendations formed the basis of the figures in his amendment. "Our amendment was derived directly from the budget recommendations made by the Assistant Secretary for Health, Edward N. Brandt, Jr., in his May 25, 1984 memorandum to HHS Secretary Heckler," Cranston wrote. In short, said a Cranston aide, the senator was taking his cues from the experts in HHS and, if NCI was not slated for additional funds, it was because of decisions made by HHS officials and by persons in the office of the director of the National Institutes of Health. In fact, that is where the cancer community's ire is directed, not at the senator himself.

Brandt's memo, which was never formally passed on to

Congress as an approved Administration request for supplemental funds, asked for a \$20 million add-on for AIDS for FY 1984 and an additional \$36 million for FY 1985. The Administration chose instead to "reprogram" funds for AIDS from other research in order to avoid an across-the-board increase in the President's budgetary requests. By the time Cranston was drawing up his own amendment, in collaboration with Senators Edward Kennedy, Patrick Moynihan, and Donald Riegle, the amount slated for AIDS research in the cancer institute had grown from the Administration's original request of \$18.9 million to \$26.8 million. Of that, \$2 million was added in the congressional appropriations process but \$5.9 million was "reprogrammed" from other NCI activities, just as NCI supporters claim.



Alan Cranston: Caught in an intra-HHS dispute.

At issue is why Cranston, in drafting his amendment, did not put it back. According to the Senator, nothing in the HHS documents he obtained indicated that the reprogramming represented a real problem. "As to the possibility that my amendment should have sought to restore that \$5.9 million for other research purposes, I note that the Administration had very recently made the determination, reflected in the NIH allocation sheet, that that amount could be freed up for AIDS research and there was no documentation—such as the Assistant Secretary's May 25 memorandum, which was available to support additional AIDS funding—to support restoring it to the other programs."

From the point of NCI backers on this issue, the cancer institute was left in the lurch by HHS and NIH officials who could have made a case for NCI but failed to. Feelings are particularly strong because it is likely that Cranston would have included money for NCI's AIDS studies if a case had been pressed. However, in light of the fact that the cancer institute's budget is by far the largest of all the NIH institutes, it is hard for NCI to win much sympathy when it pleads for more funds.

Although the Cranston amendment is a fait accompli, the issue of AIDS versus other research programs in the cancer institute budget is sure to come up again. One NIH official, commenting privately on the matter, said, "There is some truth to what the cancer people are saying, but I do think they can absorb this."—**BARBARA J. CULLITON**