

Congress Approves Deals for Ten Universities

Grants worth \$65.6 million were in the continuing resolution; Cornell turned down its share on principle

ON 19 December, shortly before ending its 1985 session, Congress approved a few early Christmas gifts, amounting to \$65.6 million, to ten universities. Thanks largely to deals worked out by individual senators or House members, it directed the Department of Defense to spend part of its research budget at these institutions. However, one of the designated recipients, Cornell University, has turned down its gift on the grounds that the way it was awarded undermines the usual science funding mechanisms.

In fact, none of the congressionally approved grants went through the usual peer review processes, and some were not even reviewed by the appropriate congressional committees. They were inserted into the continuing resolution, a massive spending bill designed to keep several government departments operating for the rest of the 1986 fiscal year.

This rash of special grants for specific universities is the latest example of a practice that has been decried by virtually every major academic and scientific organization in the country—efforts by colleges and universities to bypass the usual review processes by seeking funding directly from Congress. However, the continuing resolution has raised the practice to a new level.

According to the congressional report accompanying the continuing resolution, the Department of Defense must make the following grants:

- Wichita State University: \$5 million for "aviation research."
- The University of Nevada at Las Vegas: \$3.5 million "for computer research and related purposes."
- The University of Kansas: \$2 million "for neurotoxin research."
- Iowa State University: \$6.5 million "for research and related purposes."
- Northeastern University: \$13.5 million "for engineering research and related purposes."
- Oregon Graduate Center: \$1 million "for advanced semiconductor research."
- Oklahoma State University: \$1 million "for research."
- Cornell University: two grants of \$5

million each for acquisition of a supercomputer and related research.

- Rochester Institute of Technology: \$11.1 million "for microelectronic engineering and imaging sciences and related purposes."

- Syracuse University: \$12 million for a computer facility. Although the report does not mention this project by name, the funds were approved by the Senate in its version of the continuing resolution and a later attempt to delete them, led by Senators William Proxmire (D-WI), John Danforth (R-MO), and Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), failed by a vote of 55 to 35. Congressional staff members say the funds were included in the final version of the resolution.

Some of these projects were inserted in the continuing resolution at the last stage, when a conference committee was ironing out differences between versions of the bill approved by the House and Senate. Thus, they did not go through the usual congressional committee process. Moreover, three of the projects—those for Northeastern

University, Rochester Institute of Technology, and the University of Nevada at Las Vegas—were originally included in the Senate version of a Commerce Department appropriations bill but were knocked out by a conference committee that drafted the final version of that measure. Their chief sponsor, Senator Alfonse D'Amato (R-NY), managed to get them included among the Defense Department provisions in the continuing resolution, however.

Cornell appears to be the only beneficiary to protest this largesse. Cornell officials say they were astonished to learn, shortly before the final version of the resolution went to the floor of both chambers, that the measure contained \$10 million for a supercomputer to be purchased by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) for use at Cornell.

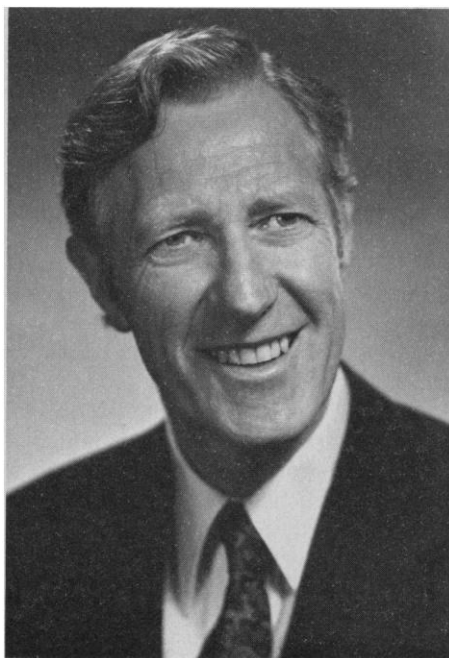
The funds were included in the resolution through an amendment proposed on the floor of the Senate by Senator Mark Hatfield (R-OR), chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee. The amendment did not mention Cornell. However, the conference committee report on the final version of the resolution stated that the machine should be purchased from Floating Point Systems, which is based in Oregon, "for use in basic research at Cornell."

When they learned of this, Cornell officials were somewhat embarrassed since the university's president, Frank Rhodes, has spoken out in the past against pork barrel funding of university research. Rhodes immediately sent a letter to members of Congress stating that Cornell "will not accept funding awards which bypass normal review procedures."

Joseph Ballantyne, vice president for research and advanced studies at Cornell, says the university has since asked Hatfield to write to DARPA instructing the agency to determine which university should receive the machine on the basis of peer review.

As it happens, Cornell had already submitted a proposal to DARPA for a Floating Point Systems machine. Hatfield's amendment would have guaranteed success for the proposal, but other universities will now be able to compete for it.

Cornell's decision has been applauded by groups that have been fighting the growing trend of pork barrel funding of university projects. "It was an extraordinarily difficult and principled act," says Robert Rosenzweig, president of the Association of American Universities. Rosenzweig is dismayed, however, by the successful efforts to get funds directly from Congress. "Maybe they all saw this as their last chance," before legislation to slash the federal deficit takes effect, he says. ■ COLIN NORMAN



Frank Rhodes

Cornell president takes a stand on principle.