network's annual budget of $185 million. The members of the board and its advisory group have been leading researchers.

But 2 years ago, FAO members established a new commission on plant genetic resources, which presumably would assume authority over the international board. The commission delegates are primarily nonscientists. Schapaugh says that developing countries are attempting "to use FAO to wrest control of germplasm resources" from the international board and "to use FAO as a visible forum to advance their prejudices against intellectual property rights and private enterprise."

A task force of the Consultative Group will soon be making a recommendation on whether the board should break away from FAO. The full Consultative Group is expected to make a final decision in May. There have been rumors that the United States would withdraw from FAO if it tried to assume more authority over the board, but Gayoso says, "The U.S. wouldn't withdraw from FAO. That has never entered the discussion." The issue is not sufficiently significant to prompt such a drastic response, he says.

To Fowler's frustration, one of the main purposes of the resolution has been lost in the face of these other debates. The real thrust of the resolution was to promote the conservation of plant germplasm, he says. FAO members have expressed increasing interest in in situ conservation, but such programs are very expensive. At the November FAO meeting, Mexico proposed that the commission conduct a study on the establishment of an international fund for plant genetic resources and many other delegates supported the idea, which was not described in any greater detail. The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* reported that a fund of $100 million was proposed and approved by a majority of the delegates, but according to transcripts of the meeting and to participants, no such proposal was made. Only the feasibility of setting up a fund was proposed, say Gayoso and Fowler, who also attended the Rome meeting. The United States opposed the feasibility of the study, contending that there are existing ways to fund conservation efforts.

Gayoso says he is encouraged by the events of the November meeting. "There was much less friction this time. Once countries start looking at it [the resolution], they'll realize how flawed it is." Fowler, however, hopes that the United States will eventually support the resolution in some form. "To discard the undertaking because of the reference to access to proprietary lines is to throw the baby out with the bath water." ■ **MARJORIE SUN**

A Plea from Academia

A long-awaited report by the White House Science Council on the health of the academic research enterprise is in the final stretch. A draft, prepared by a panel headed by David Packard of Hewlett-Packard and D. Allan Bromley of Yale University, was presented to the council on 17 January. However, its plea for a major, sustained infusion of cash to shore up the universities' research infrastructure is not likely to gain a lot of fans in a government that is obsessed with cutting the federal deficit. Indeed, with unfortunate timing, the report was presented just 2 days after the Office of Management and Budget and the Congressional Budget Office unveiled a blueprint for shaving $11.7 billion off federal spending in fiscal year 1986—a cut mandated by the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings deficit reduction legislation (see page 443).

The report, which was begun in the balmier days of early 1984 when the Reagan Administration was proposing big increases in support for academic science, rests on the premise that the universities have been constrained by insufficient and uncertain funding, and their operations have been increasingly tied up in bureaucratic red tape. "One conclusion is clear," says the draft, "our universities today simply cannot respond to society's expectations for them or discharge their national responsibilities in research and education without substantially increased support."

Pointing out that only $8 billion out of almost $100 billion devoted to R&D in the United States in 1984 was spent in the universities, the report urges the federal government to "make substantially greater investments in our centers of learning in the 1980's and 1990's than in the 1970's." Where should the money come from? "The source of such funding in these times of fiscal stringency is not obvious," it acknowledges. However, the report notes that the most likely source is somebody else's funds: "Reallocation of R&D appropriations appears to be the most probable source, but we believe that incremental new funding will be required."

One area in particular that should get some increased financial support, says the report, is research facilities. It recommends that a new fund be established in the National Science Foundation to which the universities can submit proposals. Awards, made on the basis of peer review, would have to be matched with nonfederal funds. No dollar figure is put on the proposal, but the report recommends that the funds be added to the R&D budget rather than transferred from existing activities.

In an attempt to reduce some of the bureaucracy involved in university research, the report recommends a shift to longer-term grants and contracts, with a duration of "at least three and preferably five years," and suggests that investigators be allowed to use up to 10 percent of their funds on a discretionary basis to support activities not necessarily covered by the grant.

Perhaps the most controversial feature of the report is a section aimed, ironically, at reducing the controversy surrounding reimbursement of indirect costs of university research. Indirect costs vary enormously from university to university, ranging from 99 percent of direct costs at Harvard Medical School to 30.6 percent at the University of California at San Francisco, the report notes. It suggests that a portion of indirect costs—those related to administrative expenditures—be fixed at a uniform percentage of direct costs. This would eliminate the need for faculty members to file detailed reports of how they spend their time, but it would not sit too well with those universities whose rates would be reduced. The panel also recommends that proposals submitted for peer review at the National Institutes of Health include indirect as well as direct costs, a practice already employed by the National Science Foundation. This would provide reviewers with information on the total cost of the proposal.

When he outlined the report to the White House Science Council, Bromley summed up its theme as urging a shift in attitude on the part of the federal government. He said the panel would like to see university research regarded as an investment, rather than something to be procured, like a weapons system. After the meeting, Bromley acknowledged that the fiscal climate may not be propitious, but he argued that the universities are too important to be left waiting for better times.

The draft will now be massaged by the council itself, and it is expected to go to the President in the next few weeks. ■ **COLIN NORMAN**