

# Budget Bills Boost R&D Spending

*Research and technology development seems certain to fare better than expected in 1987*

CONGRESS is finally moving toward agreement on overall budget figures for fiscal year 1987. Although there are still many twists and turns in the budget process to negotiate before individual agencies will know how much they can spend, the outlook for many R&D programs—particularly those funded by the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation—could brighten considerably.

A month ago, the congressional budget process was stalled and it appeared that uncertainty about federal support of basic research and applied science for 1987 would persist through the fall elections. However, a burst of activity by the House and Senate budget committees, resulting in passage of a budget resolution by the Senate on 2 May and imminent action in the House, may allow Congress to wind up its work on the budget before summer's end.

Behind the break in the budget stalemate are a series of compromises in the Senate on raising revenues—\$7.3 billion more than the \$5.9 billion sought by the Administration. Although not reflected in budget assumptions, strong economic performance eased congressional concerns about revenue projections and impact of imposing new taxes. Congress also is sure to slash defense spending requests in order to shield many nondefense programs from harmful cuts.

Thus, budget committee recommendations for science, technology, and education are largely favorable, relative to President Reagan's budget request. Deep cuts proposed for student loan programs, health research, and some technology development programs set off an intensive campaign effort by the education, science, and industrial lobbies to maintain or expand program support. This appears to have been partly successful.

If the appropriations committees stick closely to the total in the Senate budget resolution, overall support for health-related research will be strong. The Senate bill includes \$5.7 billion for NIH—\$800 million more than the \$4.9 billion requested by the Administration and almost \$600 million above the FY 1986 level. This increase is largely the result of an amendment proposed by Senator Lowell Weicker (R-CT), which

added \$400 million to the Budget Committee's total for NIH. The Senate bill also calls for 6000 new and competing grants to be funded in FY 1987, the same level as in the current year. The House bill does not contain a specific total for NIH, but it would increase spending on research on acquired immune deficiency syndrome by \$100 million above the \$234 million appropriated for 1986.

The House and Senate Budget Committees are also backing a \$100-million jump in outlays for NSF. The equivalent of \$150 to \$200 million in new spending authority, the hike would bring the agency's budget close to the \$1.68-billion mark proposed by the Administration. NSF officials and the basic

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***The Senate budget resolution would provide \$800 million more than the Administration requested for NIH.***

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research community have feared that the sour budget climate would hold the agency's spending authority at the 1986 level of \$1.46 billion.

Two organizations that fared less well are the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and basic energy research at the Department of Energy. The House Budget Committee calls for cutting NASA programs by \$100 million, principally through reductions and/or terminations of activities such as the Advanced Communications Technology Satellite program. The committee says such reductions are warranted because the shuttle orbiter fleet may not operate for more than a year and 30 scheduled flights may be dropped during the next 3 years. NASA's commercial aeronautical R&D effort also would be halved under the House proposal, leaving the program at \$150 million in 1987.

The space agency's budget may look a little less gloomy if a Senate-proposed \$200-million add-on survives a House-Senate conference committee. The Senate amendment would divide an additional \$200 mil-

lion in additional outlays, the equivalent of as much as \$400 million in new spending authority, between NASA and NSF. The appropriations committees are instructed to assign these increases to high-priority science and technology programs at the two agencies.

Both the Senate and House resolutions back construction of a new orbiter to replace Challenger, provided Congress approves it. But the Senate bill requires that a new source of revenue be found to fund the vehicle, which would require annual appropriations of about \$1 billion a year for several years. In effect, this would mean raising taxes or attracting private investment into the shuttle program. In contrast, the House Budget Committee imposed no stipulation on how the replacement orbiter was to be financed. The Senate also recognized in its resolution that additional budget authority and outlays would be required by NASA in FY 1988 to start work on the space station.

Under the Senate and House budget resolutions, most other science programs are to be funded at FY 1986 budget levels, unless noted otherwise in legislative language. In the case of basic energy research conducted by DOE that stipulation may work hardships on some new high energy physics accelerators at Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory and the Stanford Linear Accelerator Laboratory (*Science*, 18 April, p. 316). Both projects could lack resources to operate the world-class facilities next year, unless the appropriations committees scrape together funds from other accounts.

With respect to student aid, a major concern of the education community, the Senate and House have again rebuffed Administration efforts to impose sharp cutbacks. Nevertheless, both budget committees favor tightening the availability of such funds. The Senate has called for a \$200-million reduction in guaranteed student loans, compared to an \$855-million cut recommended by the Administration. The House Budget Committee wants a smaller, \$50-million reduction. Both bodies endorse selling college housing and higher education facility loans to save \$600 million. Still, the House calls for maintaining the revolving fund for college housing loans at \$57 million. ■

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