

Geographical Limit on Research Funds in Bill Seen as Swipe at Peer Review

Proponents of peer review have reacted with alarm to a geographical cap on spending in a university research program now before Congress. The provision, attached to the House defense appropriations bill, specifies that no state should receive more than 14% of the funds available for the Department of Defense's University Research Initiative program. URI is the major DOD program for basic research in universities, for which the House voted \$80 million. No geographic limit was included in the Senate version of the appropriations bill and the matter will be decided in a House-Senate conference.

If the geographic cap were put into effect, two states, California and Massachusetts, would suffer reductions in funds. Universities with large research programs in other states have expressed concern that such a cap might set a precedent for the award of basic research funds by criteria other than scientific merit. The American Association of Universities (AAU) and the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, the national organizations representing major research universities, are urging Congress not to impose geographical criteria in legislation on research programs.

The author of the provision, Representative Martin O. Sabo (DFL-MN), a member of the House appropriations subcommittee on defense, says that he has no plans to extend the limit to other research programs. He says the cap was devised as a reaction to a skewing of funding toward a few states in the URI program that departed from the normal pattern of distribution of federal research funds.

Last year, Sabo says he noted the trend in the new program and sought to impose a 10% cap on funding per state. The change failed in committee by a single vote. Sabo subsequently asked committee staff to do an analysis of the way federal funds for basic research in general were distributed. In particular, he thought the number of Ph.D.'s in a state was a good indication of its capacity to do research. The data showed that the correlation between the numbers of Ph.D.'s by state and federal funding for basic research was 90% or more. He indicates he was surprised and pleased to see "a fairly direct relationship between where the scientists are and where the federal dollars go."

For the URI program, however, the correlation was about 60%. With some 13% of the Ph.D.'s in science and engineering, Cali-

fornia received about 22% of URI funding. Massachusetts got 17% of the funds, and New York 11%. Sabo says the evidence that the distribution was "out of whack" in the program prompted him to propose the cap again this year. The 14% limit is evidently geared to California's 13% proportion of the technical doctorates.

Most active in opposition to the geographical cap so far has been Representative Silvio Conte (R-MA). In separate remarks printed in the House report on the DOD appropriations bill, Conte warned that the effect of the imposition of the cap and funding changes made in DOD university research funding "is to inhibit the ability of the Department to conduct sound, high quality long term basic research."

Briefing:

Applicants Deluge NSF

The National Science Foundation has received over 850 letters of intent from universities aiming to compete for the first awards under NSF's new science and technology research centers program. The foundation plans to spend about \$30 million—subject to budget adjustments—to fund the first 15 to 20 of the projected multidisciplinary research centers and support planning grants for those setting their sights on applying later. The letters alert NSF that proposals will be coming in to meet the early 1988 deadline. An NSF official allows as how the agency is "mildly overwhelmed but not surprised" at the response. ■ J.W.

President's AIDS Panel Issues First Report

After a tumultuous and highly politicized few months, the President's new and improved AIDS commission has issued its preliminary report ahead of schedule. The 26-page document does not contain any of the draconian measures feared by the commission's critics. What it does do is inform the President of what the commission has been up to for the last 5 months and where it hopes to go in the next seven.

According to the commission's new chairman, retired U.S. Navy admiral James D.

The principle of geographical distribution has general appeal to Congress, particularly for those legislators whose constituencies have not done well in the competition for research funds. In recent years, the assumption that research, especially university research, promoted economic development, has reinforced that sentiment. AAU president Robert Rosenzweig commented that attachment of the geographical cap by the committee represents a "fairly acute problem" stemming from the "widespread belief that university science and technology means jobs."

Staff sources say that Sabo is likely to continue to scrutinize the distribution of funds by research agencies "to keep them honest." His scope for direct oversight increased recently when he resumed a place on the HUD-independent agencies appropriations subcommittee which oversees funding for, among others agencies, the National Science Foundation. ■ JOHN WALSH

Watkins, the 13-member panel will tackle four issues during December and January, with an interim report and recommendations expected in February. The four areas of interest are:

■ **Prevalence of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).** "There is a clear and pressing need to gain a concrete assessment of the number of people who currently may be infected, and the number that may be expected in the future," the report states. The commission believes that hard numbers are important for planning any kind of federal response to the epidemic.

■ **New drug development and availability.** Commission members said they were concerned that there are so few drug therapies available for AIDS and ARC patients. "Many HIV-infected individuals have expressed frustration that . . . access to drug development programs is not fast enough, that the number of different drugs being tested is inadequate, and that the government agencies responsible for these programs have moved too slowly."

■ **Patient care.** According to the report, "a consistent refrain heard by the Commission from the local level was the immediate need for more home health and hospice care alternatives."

■ **Intravenous drug abuse and HIV infection.** Though dirty needles are a leading route of HIV transmission, "drug abuse treatment programs are still unavailable to many HIV-infected individuals. Yet we know that without such programs there will be little chance to halt the growing spread of the virus among this segment of the population." ■ W.B.