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# EDITORIAL

## Moderation in Science Budgeting

The way of the moderate is hard. The extremists on the left or on the right have clear simplistic messages for salvation and are deaf to arguments of complexity. The moderate sees all sides and tries to steer a middle course which satisfies neither extreme group. The banner "Moderation!" at the head of a march is never as appealing as the banner "Excelsior!" Nevertheless, the great moderates—of which Franklin Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln in U.S. history serve as examples—always had a goal. While moderates listen to both sides they have an agenda—a fair-minded "correct the mess but don't destroy the system" agenda, but at least an agenda. Lincoln wanted the conservative goal of preserving the Union, but he was willing to take the tough stand that this required the abolition of slavery. Roosevelt wanted the conservative goal of preserving capitalism and was willing to fight the "economic royalists" to provide a safety net for the poor and less privileged citizens.

President Clinton campaigned as a moderate but seemed to have a goal that included jobs, health care, and more emphasis on relief for the middle class. Despite budget restraints, scientists were expectant, for where else but in research and its applications is one likely to increase jobs and to reduce time and cost in hospitals? Rumbly of prioritizing basic science with the concept of enhancing those areas that are likely to have spin-offs were heard. But then in a series of actions that cannot help but confuse if not totally discourage scientists, President Clinton blasted the pharmaceutical industry—one of the most successful U.S. industries both within the country and internationally—with a resultant immediate loss of thousands of jobs and the likelihood of much greater job losses later. He chilled the biotech industry—probably the best chance the United States has to get a lead in a global market and to create jobs at home. Moreover, one of the great export industries of the past was the agricultural industry, and its logical heir is biotechnology.

Next the budget appeared with some minor but decent increases for the National Science Foundation, a nondecision on the supercollider, a quasi-decision on the space station (we will send up half a space station), a little more money for materials science and computers (good potential jobs areas), and a message to little science in general suggesting that it will do well if (and only if?) the big items of megascience do not have trouble in Congress. If that happens, clearly the priority would appear to be big science, or to express it another way, jobs now versus jobs in the future. The most serious decision is that of keeping the appropriations for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) flat (a small increase of less than inflation) when jobs, exports, and better health care all are touted as the priorities of the new Administration. Is better health care now defined as more polished iron lungs and fewer future vaccines? Are jobs defined as quick fixes on roads, new buildings, and big projects but a retreat from the tough competition of an international market? The president's science adviser explained the NIH decision as "The NIH did well in the past...." Apparently a new doctrine of fairness in the light of history has now been added as an alternative to future value or present efficiency in research.

Bill Clinton never promised massive increases in science funding, but it is difficult to understand how he plans to create jobs unless he is thinking in terms of science and technology creating new industries. Of course it is not clear what the Clinton Administration means by creating jobs. One way is to get back the auto industry by paying American workers less than their foreign competitors. Another way is to employ laid-off defense workers in the job of building roads—great for jobs and tough on the deficit. Somehow these programs do not seem to be dynamic slogans for 1994. The alternative is to provide leadership in the way that a country with a high standard of living should: in science and technology with a clarion call to science funding, in investment policy, and in encouragement of venture capital. The budget and public rhetoric have had the opposite effect.

To put the most optimistic face on the news, it should be remembered that there is bound to be a long war on the budget\* and the true priorities of the Clinton Administration may emerge when fights for individual budgets are joined. Is science to be given a priority and is it to be the kind of science that creates jobs? The scientific community can hardly be stirred to action by a wavering trumpet (or is it an uncertain saxophone?).

Daniel E. Koshland, Jr.

\*For example, see *Science* **260**, 284 (1993).