

SCIENCE FUNDING

NSF's Hopes Filibustered

The prospects for getting a quick funding increase for basic research at the National Science Foundation (NSF) this year, and for launching the "data superhighways" program at the Department of Commerce, have gone from dazzling to desperate almost overnight. The lights went out when President Clinton's emergency supplemental request bill died last week. As a result, scientists seeking new NSF grants can expect funds to remain extremely tight this year and next—unless something dramatic comes along between now and October to change the situation.

The bill, whose main purpose was to pay for summer jobs and highway construction, ran into a wall of opposition from Republican senators who argued it would run up the deficit without any clear reason for doing so. In the face of an unbreakable filibuster, the Democrats have now withdrawn the bill, and it's not clear what will come next. For science, the crucial part of the moribund package was a section requesting \$207 million for NSF in 1993, most of it earmarked for research. The Administration hoped to get NSF back on a track of steady growth, repairing setbacks that occurred last fall when Congress curbed growth in investigator-originated, or "curiosity-driven," NSF grants. Strategic programs—high-speed computing, manufacturing research, and small business subsidies—were allowed to grow. Had the supplemental bill passed, it would have

restored the cuts and expanded the baseline on which the 1994 increase will be calculated.

Without that interim boost, NSF will be hard pressed to get anything like the \$3.2 billion budget it has requested for 1994. To hit that target from the lower baseline, NSF would have to receive a 1-year increase of 16%—a figure that would be out of line with what most other agencies are likely to get in 1994. A 16% increase will be a "hard sell" in Congress, according to Kevin Kelly, chief aide for Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) on the staff of the Senate appropriations subcommittee that approves funding for NSF and the space program. As a result, Kelly warned an audience at the AAAS annual R&D colloquium that 1994 could be a tough year for all agencies, and science would not escape the pain.

Commerce, meanwhile, will lose a \$64 million boost proposed this year for the new National Telecommunications and Information Administration. The primary effect, says a spokesman, will be to delay the data superhighway program 6 months. The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) will suffer two setbacks, according to spokesman Michael Newman. It will have to do without the \$14 million it was slated to get this year to start developing high-speed network technology. And it will have to reduce the number of grants it hoped to award under the advanced technology program. About 250 proposals

have been submitted in the technology competition now under way, Newman says. If the supplemental funding had passed, NIST would have been able to fund 40 of them; now, lacking the \$103 million increase proposed for 1993, NIST can support only 15 to 20 proposals. What really hurts, Newman says, is that many people who might have been able to start work this year will now have to resubmit proposals and go through the mill again.

That might change if the White House can salvage some of the proposals in the stimulus package. According to a Senate commerce committee aide, "there are lots of discussions going on" about that possibility. The Administration still plans to ask for a supplemental appropriation—to pay for peace-keeping in Somalia and Russian aid—but it is not clear whether it will try to fund high-speed computer networks once again. Even the summer jobs and the childhood immunization programs remain in limbo just now. There's been talk of shifting money out of certain accounts and into the computer technology program to get it moving—although, as the commerce committee aide points out, "that's already happened, in a sense," because high-performance computing was protected from budget cuts in the 1993 NSF budget, even while basic research suffered. But no new plan for brightening the prospects for R&D—by either increasing or reprogramming funds—has yet been submitted to Congress.

—Eliot Marshall

BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH

Sex Surveys Come Out of the Closet

It's not often that an article in a peer-reviewed scientific journal becomes a hot topic of conversation around breakfast tables and in offices across the country. But that's what happened earlier this month when the March/April issue of *Family Planning Perspectives* printed the results of one of the most thorough surveys ever of U.S. sexual behavior, and newspapers around the nation carried its findings on their front pages. The survey's statistics about homosexuality, condom use, and other provocative topics stirred up a good deal of scientific attention as well.

Experts in sexual behavior are hailing the study, performed by a team from the Battelle Human Affairs Research Center in Seattle, as a major advance in understanding human sexual habits. Says Robert Michael, an economist at the University of Chicago who works on sexual behavior studies, "The [Bat-

telle] study moved us forward substantially" by corroborating data from other, smaller studies. But the survey also underscored the pressing need for additional research: Its sample was relatively small—only 3321 men—and an even newer (and smaller) survey has already disputed one of its most striking findings, that only about 2% of men report a homosexual encounter in the past 10 years.

Confirming and extending the Battelle survey would have been slow work in the Bush years, when conservative politics stalled large sex research projects. The Clinton Administration, however, seems to have "a much more positive attitude towards this kind of work," says Joseph Catania, a psychologist at the Center for AIDS Prevention Studies (CAPS) of the University of San Francisco, and researchers are hoping to conduct new studies in the next few years.

The need to learn more about the prevalence of various sexual behaviors in the United States and about how prevalence varies with age, ethnic group, and other factors is not strictly academic, points out Sevgi Aral, a sociologist at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention who focuses on the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. Only by studying sexual behavior, researchers say, can they hope to understand—and staunch—sexual

SURVEY OF RECENT SEX SURVEYS

	British	French	Battelle
Percentage who reported a homosexual encounter in past 5 years	1.4	1.4	2.3 (past 10 yrs)
Number of sexual partners in the previous year	1.2 (heterosexual only)		
Number of sexual partners in the previous 18 months			1.1
Number of occasions of intercourse in previous 4 weeks		8.0	3.7 (vaginal sex)
Total number of partners		11.0	7.3 (heterosexual)
All statistics are for men only. Because of differences in methodology, findings are not strictly comparable.			