1995 SCIENCE BUDGET

Hitting the President's Target Is Mixed Blessing for Agencies

The 103rd Congress won't exactly go down in history as a model of cooperation between the legislative and executive branches of the U.S. government. But on one issue—how to carve up the federal R&D pie—Congress and President Clinton pretty much saw eye to eye. In the weeks before Congress adjourned for the November elections, it passed a dozen appropriations bills for fiscal year 1995 (which began on 1 October) that closely tracked the R&D budget requests the Administration submitted in February (*Science*, 11 February, p. 744).

For researchers, that's good news—and bad news (see table). Large increases for the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) are offset by decreases in many of the R&D accounts at the Department of Energy (DOE) and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). The National Institutes of Health (NIH) gets barely enough to keep up with inflation, as does the R&D account for the Environmental Protection Agency. The net result is a small rise in the civilian R&D budget, which could practically disappear if Congress rescinds $532 million in provisional funding for two programs.

It could have been much worse: Overall spending caps have forced deep reductions in the budgets and staffs of many agencies. Indeed, compared with many areas of government spending, R&D has come out of the budget mill in relatively good shape—confounding some dire predictions that this would be the year in which the federal deficit would finally clobber science.

As a consequence, opinion about the 1995 budget conforms to that old adage: Where you stand depends on where you sit. "Overall, it looks pretty good to us," says M. R. C. Greenwood, associate director for science at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. "To be sure, we are struggling with the physical science budgets at the mission agencies—DOE, NASA, and the Department of Defense [DOD]. But the NSF and NIST figures are welcome news, and even the NIH budget, given the circumstances, is not a bad mark. Steady growth in the federal R&D budget continues to be our goal."

But Representative George Brown (D–CA), chair of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee, finds little solace in those same numbers. "We're no closer to equalizing civilian and defense spending [a balance that Clinton has pledged to achieve by 1997] than we were last year," he grumbled at a recent press briefing. "Nor are we moving toward 3% of GNP [a figure cited by a recent White House statement on science for combined public and private investment in research, which is now 2.6% of gross national product]. In addition, rising interest rates are going to increase the national debt, and that means more pressure to cut spending."

In addition to setting funding levels for the government's $73-billion research enterprise, Congressional appropriators produced a bumper crop of directives to the bureaucrats who parcel out the money. For example, NSF officials were told to put at least $250 million into their pending 1996 budget request for academic facilities—or lose an extra $132 million for the program given to them in 1995. Likewise, NASA was told to come up with at least $400 million in 1996—as well as a long-range plan—to build two wind-tunnel facilities for which Congress appropriated $400 million this year, or lose funding for the entire project.

In both cases, the language came from the Senate panel chaired by Senator Barbara Mikulski (D–MD). "We are working with Mikulski to resolve the issue," says Greenwood, adding, "a positive mark is better than no mark at all."

In another area of intense interest to universities, two appropriations panels—Defense and Labor/Health and Human Services—have asked the Administration to review indirect cost rates charged by universities as overhead for federally funded research. Earlier this year Congress rejected a White House budget proposal for a 1-year freeze on such payments, but Greenwood says that an executive-branch panel studying the issue is expected to report its findings "before the president submits his 1996 budget" in February.

Another wild card is how DOD will comply with an order to reduce its support of university-based research by $200 million. Legislators did not single out basic research in that cost cutting, however, leaving out the possibility the ax will fall mainly on applied efforts. "We hope to hold down the impact" on academic research programs, Deputy Secretary of Defense John Deutch told *Science* last week. "With a few exceptions, they will be across-the-board cuts" rather than large reductions in specific programs.

Now that Congress has gone home to campaign, the budgetary action shifts to the executive branch. Agency officials will spend the next several weeks drawing up detailed spending plans for 1995, and last month they submitted their 1996 requests to the Office of Management and Budget. Those negotiations will determine whether the Clinton Administration is able to keep its oft-cited commitment to keep civilian research spending rising in an era of tight fiscal constraints.

–Jeffrey Mervis

THE 1995 FEDERAL BUDGET FOR SCIENCE

AGENCY	1994 level	Congress approved	Clinton request	% change ('94 to '95)
National Institutes of Health	10,937	11,334	11,471	+3.6
Human Genome	127	153	152	+22.2
National Science Foundation	2,983	3,396	3,200	+13.9
Research directorates	2,163	2,280	2,348	+5.4
Education	570	606	586	+6.3
Academic infrastructure	105	250	55	+138.0
Department of Defense				
Research and development	35,191	35,500	36,225	+0.9
University research	1,279	1,460	1,470	–12.4
Ballistic missile defense	2,607	2,800	2,980	+7.4
Department of Energy				
Basic energy sciences	802	747	741	–6.8
High-energy physics	628	647	622	+3.0
Advanced Neutron Source	17	21	40	+23.5
Biological, environmental	416	445	435	+6.9
Nuclear physics	353	335	301	–5.3
Fusion	338	372	372	+10.5
NASA				
Research and development	9,824	9,455	9,462	+3.8
Space station	1,940	1,890	1,890	–2.6
Nat'l Institute of Standards and Technology	520	855	935	+64.4
Advanced Technology Prog.	199	431	451	+116.5
Department of Agriculture				
National Research Initiative	105	103	130	–2.0
Environmental Protection Agency				
Research and development	338	350	364	+3.1

SOURCE: AAAS, 1995 APPROPRIATIONS BILLS