

Two Senators Target Defense Research

While most federal programs are bracing for cuts, one area has been promised more money: the military. But those increases may come at the expense of basic research funded by the Pentagon. In a letter sent last week to President Bill Clinton, two prominent senators on the Armed Services Committee proposed eliminating \$1.5 billion now being spent in military-sponsored medical and university research—including a prominent breast cancer research program—so that the Defense Department can beef up troop readiness, quality of life, and modernization efforts. These research efforts are included in an \$8 billion package of defense programs that Senators John McCain (R-AZ) and John Warner (R-VA) claim “are wasteful and which contribute little, if anything, to our defense posture.”

White House officials have reacted vigorously to the senators’ plan to cut current spending. “This would have a devastating impact on both our top 200 research universities and our engineering and science talent,” says Lionel (Skip) Johns, associate director for technology at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.

The research cited by the senators includes high-performance

computing and several dual-use technology programs, as well as a collection of defense conversion programs, totaling \$1.5 billion, and the \$550 million Technology Reinvestment Program (*Science*, 25 March, p. 1676). However, the proposed McCain-Warner cuts are not the first attack on the 1995 defense budget for academic research: Last summer the Democratic-controlled Congress trimmed \$200 million after rejecting a \$900 million cut sought by Representative John Murtha (D-PA).

McCain and Warner based their proposed cuts on information provided by the Congressional Research Service (CRS), which was asked to identify programs in the \$263 billion defense budget that fall outside a strict definition of national security. Although CRS analysts noted that many of the programs fall into a gray area, the senators simply targeted most of the items on CRS’s list.

The fate of the proposal will be determined when the new Congress takes up a package of rescissions to the 1995 budget. And the White House is hoping to beat back the challenge. “I’m confident the impact of these proposed rescissions has not been made clear to the senators,” says Johns.

—A.L. and Jeffrey Mervis

and has won huge increases for the Commerce Department’s National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) to do so. But Walker and a number of Republicans see much of its growth as unnecessary governmental interference in the private sector and are likely to go after such efforts as the Advanced Technology Program (ATP).

“We’re going to have to educate [congressional] members about the value of ATP,” says Commerce Undersecretary Mary Good about the \$430 million program that funds joint government and industry partnerships in a host of high-risk technologies. “A lot of them just don’t realize how important it is to industry.” NIST Director Arati Prabhakar admits it won’t be an easy sell. “Given our philosophical differences with Mr. Walker, we don’t anticipate turning him into a big supporter,” she says.

The Senate may be more receptive to the Administration’s message, however. Senators Larry Pressler (R-SD), who will chair the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, and Conrad Burns (R-MT), who will oversee the committee’s panel on science, support NIST, says Prabhakar. Burns was the lone Republican senator to support the National Competitiveness Act that encouraged government-industry partnerships, and last week he told an industry

group that NIST efforts like ATP “are headed in the right direction.” Even so, Burns said he will hold hearings next year to assess the programs.

A host of other programs spread among federal agencies could be in even bigger trouble, according to federal agency officials and congressional sources. Some agricultural research and the proposed National Institute for the Environment seem unlikely to find favor in a cash-strapped Republican Congress, and the government’s \$1.5 billion in global climate change research could also become a target for conservatives who discount the threat from global warming. Senators Trent Lott (R-MS), the new majority leader, and Burns have pressed to reduce

money for this research, but James Baker, chief of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), says “the ideological difference is over what policy decisions to make” based on the data being collected, not whether the research is valid.

Fusion advocates hope to find greater support for their cause among the new Republican chairs, although budget constraints may limit their options. Representative John Myers (R-IN), who will chair the appropriations subcommittee that oversees energy programs, pressed the Energy Department this year to choose a site for the \$8 billion to \$10 billion International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor, now being planned by teams in the United States, Germany, and Japan. In the Senate, Mark Hatfield (R-OR), who will head the full Appropriations Committee as well as the energy and water development subcommittee, has also supported fusion efforts.

Meanwhile, White House officials are pondering a strategy for saving their science and technology priorities. “We have to communicate to members of the new majority the importance of investing in basic science,” says Lionel (Skip) Johns, associate director for technology at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. “We have a great deal of evidence that supports our strategy. ... But we have to make the sale.”

—Andrew Lawler

