Is Science Lobbying an Oxymoron?

As Congress takes aim at research budgets, scientists and their organizations are struggling to find ways to make themselves heard on Capitol Hill

Mathematicians are the last people you'd think of as haunting Washington's corridors of power. And with headquarters in Providence, Rhode Island, the 30,000-member American Mathematical Society operates far from those marble halls. But with funding for research on the congressional chopping block this summer, the society can't afford to stay away. That's why it has hired a seasoned lobbyist and issued an unprecedented public statement asking lawmakers to include scientists as they make decisions on research funding. "There is a lot of stress and anxiety in the community, and our members are demanding we do more," says William Jaco, the society's executive director. "We need to make more contacts and be more visible."

The society's decision to enter the world of politics is one sure sign of change in the scientific community prompted by the November congressional elections. The new Republican leadership has proposed cuts in almost every area of science and technology (*Science*, 19 May, p. 964). The attacks are forcing scientists to confront their traditional lack of unity and distaste for politics. But there is considerable concern that the community will not move fast or far enough.

RICK KOZAK

Political science. The House Science Committee has proposed smaller budgets for a host of federal science agencies.

"A combination of arrogance and ignorance" stands in the way of effective lobbying by the country's scientists, says physicist Allan Bromley, former science adviser to President George Bush. The arrogance, says Bromley, comes from a feeling that politicians should not question the value of science's contribution to society. And the arrogance is compounded by a failure to recognize for whom they ultimately toil: "Why is it so hard for the science and technology community to understand their customer is the American public?" fumes Daniel Goldin, head of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Limited victories

But among the growing worries, there have been victories. With the help of the Internet and friends in Congress, some disciplines have managed to beat back specific cuts. This year's biggest success so far has been by a coalition of medical researchers, biotech companies, and their allies (see p. 21). And last month nuclear physicists moved quickly and effectively to derail a House attempt to chop Energy Department funding for university-based accelerators. At the same time, a campaign by social scientists forced House lawmakers to retreat from a planned attack on National Science Foundation (NSF) programs in those disciplines.

But winning those battles hardly means science resembles the political lobbying machines operated by the elderly or gun enthusiasts. Some of the "victories," in fact, were Pyrrhic: In the case of biomedical research, the money saved comes out of the pocket of almost every other domestic research agency—shifting rather than eliminating the pain to science. In the case of the social sciences, the victory was dampened by lackluster support from researchers in other fields. This divisiveness must be corrected, policy-makers say. "None of us will get a full meal if we continue to fight each other for table scraps," says Jack Gibbons, the president's science adviser.

Gibbons's plea for unity came at an unusual 26 June meeting of more than 100 affiliates of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) (publisher of *Science*) to discuss ways to lobby Congress. There, at least, the participants, from organizations spanning science, seemed on the verge of agreeing upon a joint statement expressing personal concerns over the implications of budgetary trends. (While a draft was circulating, the AAAS Board of Directors passed such a statement, to be published in the 28 July issue of *Science*.)

But the participants ignored a suggestion from George Washington University political scientist William Wells to organize a national coalition to lobby lawmakers and alert scientists to funding threats. Wells, a veteran congressional and White House science official, advocated using sophisticated lobbying techniques, resembling those used by the Christian Coalition and others, to mount a defense of federally funded research.

Saving social sciences

In lieu of such a coordinated effort, science lobbyists are scrambling to save their own specific programs. Social and behavioral scientists, for example, leapt into action when Chris Wydler, a staffer working for Science Committee Chair Robert Walker (R–PA), decided NSF funding of their disciplines was a ripe target. Walker criticized funding for these fields at a press conference hours after the House Budget Committee completed its deliberations on a federal budget resolution.

His comments sparked an intensive campaign by the Consortium of Social Science Associations and the Coalition for National Science Funding, which represents more than 70 groups in science and engineering fields. The two groups coordinated mass mailings to Congress and a targeted campaign to contact sympathetic lawmakers and those with a line to Walker, such as Representative Jerry Lewis (R–CA), who chairs the House panel that oversees NSF appropriations. The groups also won endorsements from influential people and organizations, and NSF Director Neal Lane wrote two letters to Walker defending the social sciences.

But the campaign ran into problems, says Howard Silver, head of both the consortium and the NSF coalition. Some other scientific disciplines refused to weigh in. And molecular biologist Bruce Alberts, president of the National Academy of Sciences, at first declined to support the effort. "They believed the only way to act is to write a public letter," Alberts told *Science* in a 26 June interview. "We disagreed. The social scientists say that if you don't make a public statement, we're against social science—which is totally ridiculous." Later that day, however, the academy released a statement from Alberts affirming its support for the social and behavioral sciences. By then, however, Walker had already retreated from his budget-chopping plan.

The ambivalent response to the threat from the overall scientific community con-

Dissecting a Biomedical Victory

When it comes to influencing Congress, basic science can't compete with corporations and laser-sharp single-interest groups. But even without a million-dollar campaign kitty or polished lobbyists, one scientific group has so far protected its interests on Capitol Hill this year: biomedical researchers.

That group's latest achievement was its stunning victory on 24 May in the U.S. Senate. Senator Mark Hatfield (R–OR) persuaded his colleagues to reject a plan drawn up by senior Republican Senator Pete Domenici (R–NM) that would have reduced funding by 10% next year for the National Institutes of Health (NIH)—a "devastating" proposal, as NIH Director Harold Varmus called it. Instead, the Senate adopted, by a vote of 85–14, an amendment that would cut NIH's budget by only 1% (*Science*, 2 June, p. 1271). Although the actual NIH budget for 1996 has not yet been set (it will be established by appropriators who begin meeting next week), Hatfield sees the vote on his amendment as a sign of "the political awakening of the biomedical research community."

PATRICK WHITE/AAI

White knight. Biomedicine's champion, Mark Hatfield *(center)*, feted by Richard Dutton *(left)* and Robert Rich of the American Association of Immunologists.

The community may have awakened recently, but its first stirrings go back to 1982, when proposed cuts by the Reagan Administration prompted several dozen professional societies to form the "Ad Hoc Group for Medical Research Funding." Last year, as the Clinton Administration tried to overhaul the health care system, the "ad hoc" network was rejuvenated when its coordinator, the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), joined the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB) to keep tabs on funding proposals. Along the way, they endorsed a plan by Hatfield and Senator Tom Harkin (D–IA), former chair of the Senate appropriations subcommittee that drafts the NIH funding bill, to support NIH with a tax on health insurance premiums. Although the idea went down in the defeat of health care reform, the biomedical groups learned how to coordinate a quick political response—a skill that proved valuable this year when Congress began to slash the domestic budget.

In early May, the House budget committee proposed cutting NIH funding by 5%, and the Senate was rumored to be planning to double that figure. As Senate staffers drafted a budget resolution, some leaders of the biomedical community appealed for help directly to powerful Republicans. FASEB President Samuel Silverstein made several trips to the Hill, for example, taking along such industry leaders as Leon Rosenberg of Bristol-Myers Squibb and Edward Penhoet of Chiron Corp. On 11 May, they met with House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R–GA) to talk about biotechnology's contributions to the economy and pointed out that the industry depends on basic biology for new ideas. Silverstein says Gingrich promised to help NIH.

Fortuitously, the Dana Alliance for Brain Initiatives—a nonprofit group that promotes neuroscience research—had scheduled a briefing by Nobel Prize–winning researchers and others on Capitol Hill on 16 May. Sixteen members of Congress attended. Among those who spoke about the importance of funding NIH was Representative John Porter (R–IL), chair of the House labor and health appropriations subcommittee.

Meanwhile, back in the Senate, Domenici's committee released a plan requiring a cut of at least 10% for NIH in 1996, followed by a freeze. Once this appeared in print, the biomedical lobby reacted quickly. Senator Edward Kennedy (D–MA), according to an NIH official, suggested holding a pro-NIH rally in a Senate committee room. The call for logistical help went out to Marguerite Donoghue, a staffer at Capitol Associates, a lobbying firm headed by former Hatfield aide Terry Lierman. Donoghue secured the ad hoc network, now with 180 members, as a sponsor, and she recruited researchers to speak about the value of biomedical research. She also snared several senators, including two powerful Republicans: Hatfield, who chairs the appropriations committee, and Senator Arlen Specter (R–PA), who chairs the subcommittee under Hatfield that drafts the NIH appropriation. Hatfield promised to take the fight for NIH to the floor of the Senate, which was to vote in a few days.

As Hatfield and Specter recruited sponsors for their amendment, AAMC's Dave Moore alerted the ad hoc network via fax. FASEB's congressional relations chief Gar Kaganowich organized a similar alert over the Internet, transmitting more than 13,000 messages over the wires. In addition, the group enlisted help from the 5000 members of the American Society for Microbiology, then holding its annual meeting in Washington, D.C.

A Senate staffer says Hatfield initially had difficulty rounding up sponsors: "We kept picking up one member and losing another." But the day before the vote, the idea began to win endorsements, and by 24 May it passed easily. In public testimony last week, Hatfield said, "The overwhelming strength of the budget vote was a surprise." He said he was encouraged that scientists were coming out of their labs and entering the policy debate. "Now that they have arrived," Hatfield predicted, "I have no doubt that their powerful message will take hold across Capitol Hill."

–Eliot Marshall

trasts sharply with that of a similar attack on the social sciences in the first year of the Reagan administration. The academy and others quickly and publicly denounced that earlier effort, and Congress restored many of the programs put on the chopping block. "This time, we only heard from the social scientists," says one Republican staffer. "There was not a large and visible public effort [by leaders of the science community] to save these disciplines," Wells adds.

In the end, the NSF bill that the House Science Committee passed last week proposes the same percentage cut for the social sciences as for other disciplines. However, the bill would also force NSF to eliminate one of its seven research directorates—and urges NSF in the bill's report to consider dropping the social sciences directorate.

Even so, Silver can claim victory. "We moved Mr. Walker a little bit," he says. "We're convinced his original intention was to eliminate all funding. Wydler viewed [social sciences] as left-wing crap; they've been disabused of that notion." Wydler declined comment, although a colleague says that the size of the reaction, if not its scope, caught Wydler by surprise. "He barricaded himself in his office and wouldn't come out," the staffer recalls.

Divided over united front

The muted response from the overall community to the travails of social scientists underscores the absence of a single politically oriented network or organization for science. Existing organizations, say policy-makers, face serious obstacles to playing such a role. The AAAS, for example, is a nonprofit organization that, under tax rules, can spend only a small percentage of its resources on direct lobbying. And the academy is chartered by Congress to provide impartial advice to the government. "We're not a lobbying organization," says Alberts, adding that "it would be totally impossible to defend against every cut." Indeed, last month Alberts urged Congress to spare competitive peer-reviewed research done at universities, but refrained from citing any broader concerns.

And then there is the touchy question of finances. "You don't bite the hand that feeds you," notes one science lobbyist, referring to the fact that 85% of the academy's budget comes from the government. For AAAS the figure is 12%.

But taking a cautious approach in this tumultuous new Congress will not work, others say. "The academy and other organizations feel they're above influencing Congress," says Representative George Brown (D–CA), the ranking minority member of the House Science Committee. That view, Brown believes, is naive. Wells laments what he sees as the prevailing attitude that "we're pure and working for the common good, so we shouldn't have to argue the case."

But there are moves afoot to change this. The Council of Scientific Society Presidents, for example, hopes to parlay its huge constituency—more than 100 organizations with 1.68 million members, including many science educators—into an effective fighting force. The council is "much more engaged in political dialogue" than at any time since its 1973 founding, says its executive director, Martin Apple. But that group's clout is diluted by the nature of its leading participants—part-time policy-makers with limited terms of office. "The presidents of science organizations are in many ways politically naive and conservative in areas outside their field," laments one association manager.

Wells's blueprint is more radical. He would like to see a permanent lobbying effort called the National Coalition for Science and Engineering begun by 1996. In the short term, he proposes more frequent meetings by lobbyists to share intelligence and ensure total coverage of Congress. Brown supports the idea. "You need to organize here and out in the boondocks," he says. "Fully one third of the members of Congress are on committees that play some role in science."

This kind of organization traditionally is anathema to disciplines, universities, and businesses. "We've been very poor about setting priorities between fields, unlike within fields," says Cornelius Pings, president of the Association of American Universities. "It shouldn't be a surprise we're not good at making the ties between astrophysics and cell biology." Some are skeptical that a fractious science community can be brought together under one banner. Says Jack Crowley, lobbyist for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology: "We're a highly diverse and decentralized agglomeration of people and institutions. It's unlikely a single entity with a single voice could proclaim for all disciplines."

"None of us will get a full meal if we continue to fight each other for table scraps."

—Jack Gibbons

Making grassroots grow

Meanwhile, individual societies are trying to take the grim budget message to their constituents. Do-it-yourself lobbying kits are popping up around the country as a result of the budget threats, spread through the Internet or publications. The May/June issue of the American Society of Plant Physiologists' newsletter, for example, includes a sample letter to members of Congress. "Cuts in research funding can prove to be counterproductive in the effort to balance the budget," the draft states, because such research helps create "thriving new markets for improved food and other plant products."

But congressional staff members warn that such letters have little effect on lawmakers if they appear to be forms filled out by dutiful members of an association. Much more effective, they say, are the tactics of the Christian Coalition, which within hours can activate members around the country through computer and phone networks, generating thousands of individual responses that capture the attention of lawmakers.

Brown believes scientists have an edge in such competition because of the respect society accords them. But setting in motion such a coordinated lobbying effort, he warns, "is going to take an act of real leadership coming from the responsible statesmen of science." Right now, Brown says wryly, "scientific lobbying is an oxymoron."

If it takes a genuine crisis to galvanize U.S. researchers, then lawmakers say this year's federal budget battles fill the bill. So far, however, the new reality has not sunk in. "The science community has been slower than other parts of the federal establishment to understand the reality of deficit control," says Representative Steve Schiff (R–NM), who chairs the House Science basic research subcommittee. "They have not grasped it."

Kevin Kelly, a staffer for Senator Barbara Mikulski (D–MD), predicts it will take the shock of cuts and urges prospective science lobbyists to keep their message as broad as possible. "They have to take the mantra of JFK: 'A rising tide lifts all boats.' " In the meantime, say Silver, Crowley, and others, the daunting challenge is to slow the outgoing tide.

–Andrew Lawler

FRANCE

Budget Ax to Spare Research?

PARIS—Ever since conservative politician Jacques Chirac was elected president of France in May, the nation's researchers have been bracing themselves for the worst. Chirac, who served as prime minister between 1986 and 1988, has never been known as a friend of French science, so there was widespread fear that the new government would take an ax to the research budget. And when, last week, the finance ministry announced that it planned to slash more than $4 billion in public spending previously approved for the second half of 1995, there was little hope that research would emerge unscathed.

But now it appears that French science may get off easy. Although detailed figures had not been officially revealed as *Science* went to press, government sources say that the overall civilian research and development budget, which totals about $10 billion, is not likely to be cut. One reason is that the government feels bound by the many promises that the previous administration—also a conservative government—made to French scientists. For example, last year former Research Minister François Fillon succeeded in convincing the French Parliament to pass a law requiring France to catch up with other industrial countries such as Japan and the United States in research spending as a percentage of gross national product (*Science*, 24 June 1994, p. 1840).

And one important promise the government apparently intends to honor, at least in part, is to make up for a whopping deficit at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique. The budget of the CNRS, France's largest public research agency, has fallen at least $200 million short over the past few years as a result of freezes on money originally approved for the