

BUDGET RESOLUTION

Senate Panel Backs Large NIH Increase

In the first clear indication of how Congress views President Clinton's 1999 request, a Senate panel last week called for a whopping 11% increase for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and expressed support for basic research at a few other agencies.

The resolution, backed by Senator Pete Domenici (R-NM) and approved by the Senate Budget Committee, offers an outline of how appropriators should allocate their funding and marks a first step in a tortuous process leading to agency budgets this fall. Even as the Senate panel was debating the resolution, however, the White House was trying to win over the scientific community in the rancorous debate over the use of tobacco money to fund some of its proposed increases in R&D. There were also signs of growing unease about NIH's favored budget status.

Although the NIH number, \$15.1 billion, is \$300 million above Clinton's request for 1999, advocates for biomedical research are lobbying for more. Enlisting actors Mary Tyler Moore and Christopher Reeve for a Capitol Hill rally on 19 March, they urged legislators to double the NIH budget over the next 5 years. The second sure winner in the Senate Budget Committee's resolution is the Department of Energy's (DOE's) stockpile stewardship program, which would receive the \$4.5 billion requested by the Administration. It's a Domenici favorite, given the presence of two national labs in his state.

The outlook for other R&D programs under the plan is far less certain. Domenici's resolution "assumes an increase" for the National Science Foundation and "continues strong funding for basic research activities of the federal government, especially those activities within NSF and DOE." It does back the \$157 million requested by DOE to begin construction of the Neutron Spallation Source at Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee, but the senator has warned that it must compete with politically powerful water projects. The resolution also dismisses new spending for technology to reduce U.S. greenhouse emissions. Republicans argue that such spending is tied to Senate approval of the international agreement reached in Kyoto, Japan, last December, which is unlikely this year. But Administration officials insist the increases are warranted even if the treaty is stalled.

The Senate bill also reveals the deep split among lawmakers over how to fund any increases for research, including those for NIH. Although Domenici and some Republicans prefer to pay for those boosts out of the existing pot for domestic discretionary programs, the White House, Democrats, and some Re-

publicans look for help from additional revenues from the tobacco industry. Clinton's science adviser, Jack Gibbons, met with about 100 scientists and science lobbyists last week at the White House to urge them to back the Administration's R&D request, which would draw heavily on tobacco revenues. "This injects us into the middle of a highly politicized debate," complains one university lobbyist. Although the community wants to avoid taking sides in the debate, in private some officials express concern over the Administration's strategy. "I'd prefer to fund [the increases] through discretionary funding at the end of year rather than tobacco," says another lobbyist. "Tobacco is a much riskier bet."

Meanwhile, NIH's favored status in Congress is causing resentment among those seek-

ing increases for other research programs. Democrats on the House Science Committee urged the House Budget Committee to assign "some small portion" of NIH's proposed increases for coming years to other research agencies. "We are concerned that the aggressive funding ramp for NIH will lead to inefficiencies in the management of those funds," the lawmakers say, adding that starving other disciplines could also hinder progress in biomedical research. Although the science committee has no jurisdiction over biomedical spending, staffers say the Democratic warning reflects growing resentment within the R&D community over NIH's success.

The House is not likely to approve its own budget resolution until May, and then the two bodies must reconcile any differences. Still, Domenici's plan highlights the precarious fate of some parts of the federal R&D effort. "The message is that NIH is protected like no one else," says Michael Davey of the Congressional Research Service. "Everyone else may be in trouble."

—Andrew Lawler

HISTORY OF SCIENCE

Darwin's House: A Monument to a Theory

LONDON—After more than 100 years of varying levels of care and neglect, the house and grounds where Charles Darwin spent the last 40 years of his life—and where he drew together his crucial theoretical work on evolution—have gone through an evolutionary change themselves. Down House, in the secluded village of Downe in Kent, has been the subject of a \$4 million conservation program designed to provide an insight into Darwin's mingling of science and domestic life. The restored house opens to the public next month with a new exhibition on the upper floor explaining Darwin's earlier life and the significance of his theory of natural selection, which shook the foundations of 19th century society and transformed biological thinking. The project is managed by English Heritage, which looks after the country's key monuments and buildings. "It's a first for us, because what's primarily important at Down is the occupant and not the building. We've got to try to convey the life of a scientist," says curator Julius Bryant.

Darwin and his family moved to Down House from central London in 1842. Darwin sought a quiet country house to continue his work not too far from London, where he had already won considerable acclaim for his biological and geological stud-

ies following his worldwide tour on board the *Beagle*. Although only 20 kilometers from the city center, Down House was then, and remains today, a remarkably remote and tranquil spot, situated in the deep folds of the chalk hills of north Kent and accessible only by narrow, winding lanes. Darwin was not overly enthusiastic about the building at first. "House ugly, looks neither old nor new," Darwin wrote to a friend. But he came to relish his life deep in the countryside.

Down House has had a checkered history since Darwin's day. Following his death in 1882, it remained in the family until 1917, when it was sold and turned into a school. It was then bought in 1927 by a wealthy surgeon as a gift to the nation and opened 2 years later as a museum, with many of its original contents,



Where evolution evolved. Darwin's study, where he worked on the theory of natural selection.

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