

authored a paper, "Treatment of asthma with drugs modifying the leukotriene pathway," in which he named eight companies that he had advised and from which he had received research funds.

Asked how he would deal with matters involving potential conflicts of interest, Drazen said that he plans to be "as lily-white as possible," keeping hands off all papers or editorials involving any company that he has had recent ties with. "What I'm planning to do is review each of the companies with whom I've worked and start a 2-year clock at my last interaction with them." He says that policy could be reexamined in the future.

Drazen also says he's confident that he'll be able to run the *NEJM* as he sees fit. His predecessor was forced out after disagreements with the owners, the Massachusetts Medical Society, over the use of the journal's name and logo on other products. Marcia Angell, the magazine's longtime executive editor, who has been filling in since Kassirer's departure, says she declined to seek the job on a permanent basis after society officials refused to guarantee her control over the use of the journal's name as well as its content. Although the society says Drazen will have "complete authority" over both elements, Kassirer says he puts no stock in that pledge, because he had been given the same assurances at the start of his 8-year tenure. Angell is not quite so cynical, calling the society's statement "extremely encouraging."

As editor, Drazen says that he hopes to make the journal more accessible to practicing physicians by shortening the articles and highlighting the practical use of findings. He also wants to upgrade the journal's online content—an electronic copy of the print version—which he calls "pretty 1995."

—CONSTANCE HOLDEN

2001 BUDGET

NIH Headed for Big Boost, Others Struggle

For R&D advocates, it's a case of the good, the bad, and the ugly. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) was an early, big winner as Congress last week began the long and bitter fight over funding for the 2001 fiscal year, which starts on 1 October. Military research also got off to a strong start. But the outlook is not so rosy for two other key agencies, NASA and the National Science Foundation (NSF), which in the short run can expect only a fraction of their requested increases.

Yet the ugly truth is that the ultimate decisions on the 2001 budget almost certainly won't be made until this fall, at closed-door meetings between Administration and congressional leaders. Those meetings will pit the president's ambitious list of new initia-

tives, from nanotechnology to education, against a pledge by Republican lawmakers to hold the line on government spending. "The numbers that we see now have no bearing on the final outcome," says one bemused science agency official. "The whole situation has an unreal quality to it."

The uncertainty, however, has worried research advocates and added urgency to their efforts. The problem, they say, is that while a newly estimated \$40 billion budget surplus for next year should provide enough money for everyone, the House and Senate panels that appropriate funds are laboring under tough constraints imposed by the GOP leadership. Most of those panels have received about the same or even less funding than last year. And it is those levels, and unpredictable election-year politics, that are shaping the bills now moving through Congress. Research supporters fear that science spending could suffer from the squeeze. On 1 May a bipartisan group of lawmakers led by Senators Joe Lieberman (D-CT) and Bill Frist (R-TN) wrote to colleagues about their "responsibility to ensure our nation's continued prosperity through investment and research." The letter urged members to back increased R&D funding across all disciplines. The senators also praised a 22 March letter from a high-powered group of technology executives to Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-MS) urging greater federal R&D funding for the sake of economic competitiveness.

Those urgings are hardly needed in the case of NIH. The Senate Appropriations Committee last week recommended a whopping \$2.7 billion boost to its \$17.8 billion 2000 level—\$1.7 billion more than Clinton requested for 2001 and the third straight 15% hike. The House subcommittee took a more modest approach, providing only the president's request for a 6% boost to \$18.8 billion. Even so, aides to Representative John Porter (R-IL), who chairs the House panel, say he is still determined to match the Senate level and keep NIH on track for a doubled budget by 2003.

Both panels, however, ignored many of the president's priorities in other programs covered by the bill. For example, they made significant cuts to education, health care, and job training programs. As a result, Clinton immediately vowed to veto the bill unless those programs received additional funds.

The House subcommittee that handles the budgets for NASA and NSF, chaired by Representative James Walsh (R-NY), is slated to make its recommendations on 23 May, and the advance news is not good.

House aides say that NSF will have to make do with a hike of approximately \$150 million. That translates into less than a 4% increase for the \$3.9 billion agency, a far cry from the 17% boost the Administration requested. NSF Director Rita Colwell argues that the requested increase is needed to ensure the health of the core disciplines at the same time the country invests in such hot new areas as nanotechnology, information technology, and biocomplexity.

NASA would fare even worse. The House subcommittee is expected to approve a boost in the neighborhood of \$100 million

for the entire \$13.6 billion agency—about one-quarter of the increase the president requested. Most of the additional funding likely would go toward salaries and a space launch initiative, rather than to the series of proposed new space science initiatives, such as one to study the sun using multiple spacecraft. The House

is not opposed to the president's request, explains one staffer. But simple arithmetic ties its hands.

"The Administration went hog wild" in its budget request, he says, seeking more than \$85 billion for all the agencies funded by Walsh's panel. The subcommittee has been allotted only \$76.9 billion—slightly less than last year. Given that situation, any increase is a victory for science, say congressional aides. "They are not going to get the Administration's request," says the staffer adamantly.

Even so, committee members are clearly frustrated with their piece of the funding pie. Walsh's panel intends to write a bill containing no earmarks, or pork-barrel projects, say sources close to the committee. "It would be hard to take the bill to the floor with a straight face" if the legislation slashes programs while adding \$200 million in NASA earmarks, says one aide about what would be an unprecedented step. However, resistance may prove futile: The panel has already received more than 2000 specific requests for pork-barrel spending by members of Congress, and election-year pressure is likely to drive that number higher.

Meanwhile, defense appropriators in the House have added to the president's requested increase for research, development, testing, and evaluation in a bill whose levels are not yet public. And both the House and Senate Armed Services panels, responsible for authorizing military spending, proposed boosts of \$1.4 billion, lifting military R&D accounts by 3.7% over the president's 2001 request and by 2.6% over this year's level. —ANDREW LAWLER

