

Congress Holds Down NSF Budget; Nixon Vetoes HEW Bill

This was a bad summer for two federal appropriations in which scientists are traditionally interested. The National Science Foundation (NSF) will be getting \$18.9 million less than it wanted for fiscal 1973, and money for the Public Health Service is a disputed part of a \$30.9-billion bill President Nixon vetoed on 16 August.

Last week Nixon signed a \$650.2-million appropriation for NSF, which was substantially less than Senate boosters for the agency—notably Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.)—had in mind. Kennedy this spring was pushing for an authorization of \$747 million. The final authorization was \$704 million.

The 1973 appropriation includes the same amount in new obligational authority as the 1972 appropriation: \$619 million. On top of this, Congress put some \$31 million in funds that had been appropriated for education programs in 1971 and 1972 but that had been impounded by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

The OMB had wanted \$647.4 million in new obligational authority, plus the release of \$21.7 million in funds impounded from the fiscal 1972 budget.

The House appropriations report indicates that more funds were not forthcoming because of "growing concern" that the NSF "may be failing in the original mission it was created for"—to support basic research.

A fundamental difference of opinion between the President and Congress seems to be over the support of science education. The President, who wants to hold back on support for education until the economy perks up, requested \$86 million for science education improvement, graduate student support, and institutional improvements. This figure included reductions for the latter two. The appropriations bill does not have line items, but Congress put floors on spending for the three areas so that no less than \$109 million is available for them. Sources at NSF say the appropriation was a disappointment. The jacked-up spending on education programs means others will have to take some cutbacks—particularly research, research applications, and national and international programs.

The Administration also wanted a big hike in appropriations for Research Applied to National Needs (RANN), from last year's figure of \$51 million to about \$80 million. The appropriation stipulates no floor for RANN. The NSF wanted \$80 million; their working figure is now around \$70 million.

Some observers have speculated that NSF might have gotten more than it did if Kennedy had paid more attention to the authorization process. Kennedy was occupied with hearings on the ITT affair when the NSF subcommittee, which he heads, was holding authorization hearings. His staff also said he was more concerned with shepherding S. 32, the bill recently passed to give NSF a new role as promoter of civilian science, through committee than with the more routine matter of NSF authorizations.

At any rate, the late Senator Allen J. Ellender, chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, hustled

the appropriation bill onto the floor while the authorization was still in conference. So the Senate, which usually is more generous with the NSF than the House is, voted the same amount in new obligational authority that the House had. Kennedy was not on the Senate floor during the vote; otherwise, he might have successfully pushed through an amendment adding more money, something he has done in the past.

Kennedy's staff has said he still plans to try to engineer a supplemental appropriation for NSF, which could conceivably close the gap between authorization and appropriation.

While the Administration got less than it wanted for NSF, Nixon, on 16 August, vetoed an appropriations bill for the Department of Labor and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare that was \$1.8 billion more than he wanted. The House sustained the veto. The President criticized the bill as an example of "reckless spending." He particularly objected to the fact the \$30.5-billion bill does not include an annual limitation on federal matching funds for state social services.

The President had requested a bill appropriating \$28.7 billion for the two agencies. Congress tacked on an additional \$900 million for hospital construction, health research, and health and mental health services, and \$800 million in primary, secondary, and higher education.

The Administration asked for reductions in the budgets both of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Health Services and Mental Health Administration (HSMHA). The budget request achieves this economy largely through reducing or eliminating money for construction of hospitals and medical school facilities. Congress ignored this stipulation and earmarked \$170 million for NIH construction grants and \$197 million (the request was \$85 million) for the Hill-Burton hospital construction program, always a popular item in Congress, administered by HSMHA.

Congress also passed \$1.79 billion for NIH research. This amount, \$213 million more than the President asked, includes substantially higher increases for heart and cancer research—\$320 million and \$492 million, respectively, as opposed to the \$255 million and \$432 million contained in the request.

In the HSMHA appropriation, mental health suffered the most at the hands of the OMB, particularly the community mental health centers program. The OMB wants \$135 million for the centers, a reduction of \$15 million from the fiscal 1972 appropriation. Congress wants \$195 million. For alcoholism programs, the Administration requested a \$10 million hike, to \$80 million, while Congress voted \$143 million.

The appropriations bill now has to start all over again in the House, and no one yet knows what congressional strategists have in mind. A HSMHA spokesman points out that "things are going to get bloody" if Congress chooses to back down on heart and cancer research, because private health organizations have formed an extremely strong pressure group in the Coalition for Health Funding.—C.H.