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Prospects for Support of R & D in Fiscal 1983

A Consortium of Presidents of AAAS Affiliated Societies met in Washington on the afternoon and evening of 15 March. Scientific and engineering societies having total memberships of more than 1 million were represented. The purpose of the meeting, which was organized by AAAS staff and presided over by Margaret Burbidge, president of AAAS, was to discuss the proposed fiscal 1983 federal budget for R&D and to obtain an estimate of the appropriations that will ultimately be made. Sources of information included Senator Pete Domenici (R-N.M.), Representatives Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), Claudine Schneider (R-R.I.), and Doug Walgren (D-Pa.), and the President's science adviser, George Keyworth. Congressional staff members who participated were Fred Bernthal, administrative assistant to Senator Howard Baker (R-Tenn.); Hunter Spillan, House Appropriations Committee; and Michael Telson, House Budget Committee.

The picture that emerged was one of considerable uncertainty. At best, overall appropriations for support of academic research will rise slightly, though dropping somewhat in constant dollars. At worst, appropriations for research could drop substantially.

For the meeting and also for distribution on request, AAAS staff coordinated the preparation of a 145-page document that analyzes in detail President Reagan's proposed budget.* Sixteen organizations collaborated in the preparation of the publication.

The mood of the afternoon session was to a large degree gloomy. The pattern was set by the two Democratic staff members of the House. Telson said that in the interval 1980 to 1985 entitlement programs, including Social Security and Medicare, will increase from \$291 billion to \$410 billion. Defense expenditures will grow from \$136 billion in 1980 to \$292 billion in 1985. In contrast, discretionary programs, of which civilian research is a part, will drop from \$117 billion in 1980 to \$66 billion in 1985. In 1983, the discretionary portion of the budget is slated to drop to \$84 billion. In these circumstances, research is being treated far more favorably than other items in the major category that includes it. In the intense political infighting that will occur this election year, science will be a target. Spillan emphasized that research is very easy to cut. Many individual congressmen prefer to obtain highly visible public works for their districts. Spillan also pointed out that if there is a budget compromise and some tax cuts are eliminated, the additional funds will not go to research. They will be used to diminish the budget deficit.

In spite of this threat to support of research, a question by Bernthal drew an unexpected answer. He asked, "What is the major concern of the audience?" The consensus reply was science education at all levels and especially support for graduate students. The afternoon's proceedings were summarized by Allan Bromley, past president of AAAS, who added his own views on the subject, emphasizing that we should not lose sight of the need for better science education in the secondary schools so that when science-based issues arise an informed public will deal with them.

The evening session was dominated by Republican lawmakers. They were optimistic about support of research. The luminary with by far the greatest weight is Senator Domenici. He is chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, and when a compromise on the budget is sought he will be a key factor in reaching it. Domenici asserted that he is a strong supporter of science and that there is a comparatively large number of Ph.D.'s in his state. However, he was blunt in saying that support for military preparedness must be increased, but changes in the total budget must be restrained.

Science adviser George Keyworth has emphasized that the Administration understands that basic research is a federal responsibility. But with discretionary expenditures under extreme pressure defenders of science in both parties need to be assured by their constituents that their efforts are recognized and appreciated.—PHILIP H. ABELSON

**Intersociety Preliminary Analysis of R & D in the FY 1983 Budget*, obtainable from the Office of Public Sector Programs, AAAS, 1776 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20036.