

Future Budget Squeezes Bode III for NASA Space Science

■ NASA's space science program, already squeezed by the 800-pound gorilla space station, is going to face an even grimmer budgetary future than many people have realized, if some little-heralded recommendations in a Senate report are retained in the final appropriations bill for the space agency.

Buried within the report prepared by the Senate Appropriations Committee when it voted

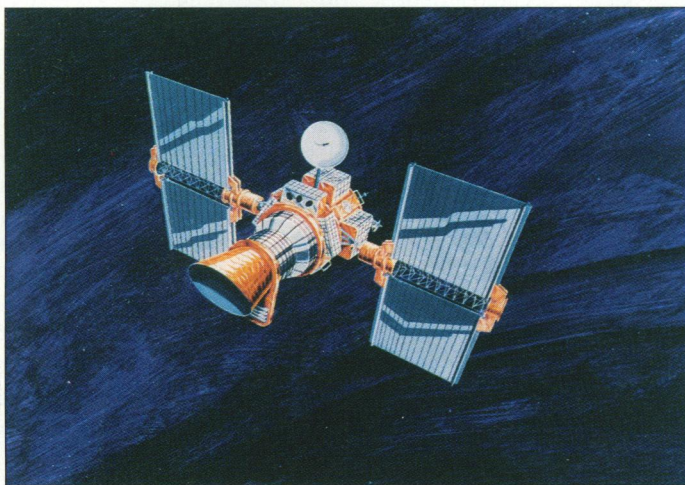
a full \$2 billion for the space station last July (*Science*, 19 July, p. 257) is language that would require NASA to prepare a 3-year budget plan that assumes "modest growth"—defined as no more than 5% growth for 1993. That doesn't sound so bad, considering that the Senate this year recommended a 3.2% increase in the NASA budget (and the House none at all), although it falls far

short of the 10% "real growth" goal set by a national commission late last year.

But the proposed slowdown in long-term growth (first reported in *Space News*) could endanger several proposed research spacecraft, such as Gravity Probe B and the Space Infrared Telescope Facility—both of which saw their design funding zeroed out in the Senate bill. The report states that NASA should "not envision any new starts" unless it can explain how it can make new programs "sustainable" within the agency's "limited funding profile."

It will likely be another couple of months before anyone learns whether the limits will survive into the final bill: An aide to the Senate Appropriations Committee says the House-Senate conference isn't likely to take place until late September or early October.

An artist's conception of the Space Infrared Telescope Facility, now in jeopardy.



Return to China

■ American archeologists will dig for fossils in China next summer—the first such group allowed by the Chinese government in 40 years. University of California paleoanthropologist J. Desmond Clark has received a permit to excavate in the country, under the single condition that he work with Chinese archeologists.

That arrangement suits Clark just fine. He joined a team of Chinese archeologists this summer in a survey—but not an actual dig—of the famous Nihewan Basin, 180 kilometers northwest of Beijing. Past excavations there have yielded stone artifacts and areas that appear to have been inhabited 1 million years ago by hominids, such as *Homo erectus*. The joint Chinese-American team, which includes Indiana University anthropologists Kathy Schick and Nicholas Toth and University of Utah geologist Frank Brown, has begun a systematic survey of nearby areas to try to reconstruct the ancient landscape and how *Homo erectus* could have exploited it.

Next summer, the team plans to begin excavation of the Nihewan sites, among the oldest in the Far East. The team also will hold workshops for Chinese archeologists in bone analysis, lithic analysis, and taphonomy, the study of how bones are modified and dispersed.

Antidepressants—Suicide Link to Get Another Look

■ The furor over the antidepressant Prozac—which, depending on whom you talk to, is either a dangerous drug that encourages suicidal tendencies in the clinically depressed or the innocent victim of a smear job masterminded by the Church of Scientology—is about to get another look. An advisory committee to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will meet later this month to review the scientific evidence linking antidepressants and suicidal tendencies.

The committee's meeting was scheduled last month after the FDA turned down a request from a Scientology-affiliated group to ban Prozac—the best-selling antidepressant on the market. According to FDA officials, several reports in the literature have associated Prozac and other antidepressants with

suicidal thoughts in clinically depressed people. Based on a review of these reports, the committee could advise drug companies to reword the label warnings on their products.

Meanwhile, drug firms are readying their defense. Last

month, the American Pharmaceutical Association mailed out a "special report" on Prozac, partly funded by Eli Lilly and Co.—the developer of Prozac. The report found "no justification for the heightened concern regarding suicidal thoughts."

■ A large part of the job of coordinating federal spending on research—a total of about \$70 billion—falls to an awkwardly named body with a nifty acronym: the Federal Coordinating Council for Science, Engineering and Technology, or FCCSET (pronounced "fix-it"). The ways of FCCSET are a mystery to many, however, which has led Representative Howard Wolpe (D-MI) to plan a hearing by early October intended to burn away some of the FCCSET fog.

Created in 1972, FCCSET was moribund until 2 years ago, when current presidential science adviser D. Allan Bromley took office. Bromley gave the council and its various committees responsibility for preparing five large interagency

science initiatives—on computing, education, global change, biotechnology, and advanced materials. But FCCSET's new vigor has drawn complaints about the secrecy in which it shrouds some of its activities, and some federal agencies have balked at FCCSET's occasionally heavy-handed attempts at coordination.

Wolpe and his colleagues will discuss whether Congress needs to set in law some of the coordinating jobs FCCSET has taken on, and might also seek to open up FCCSET's process for setting national research priorities.



Howard Wolpe