

Senators Clash Over Military "Pork"

When several science projects popped up in the Defense appropriation bill without warning last month, a few Senators roared with outrage. But only a handful of their colleagues paid them much heed. The bill proposed giving about \$120 million in special grants to research centers—most of them at universities—that had never been asked to compete, pass peer review, or even go through a perfunctory congressional hearing to win their money. These funds are in addition to the more than \$200 million for similar academic pork buried in other appropriations bills Congress approved earlier this year (see *Science*, 1 November, p. 640).

The new awards—to be scattered from Alaska to Hawaii, and from California to Massachusetts—were inserted as "earmarks" by the appropriations committees just hours before the bill went to the floor of the House and Senate for up-or-down votes. The appropriations chiefs set it up that way, permitting no amendments. This rule and the porkbarrel style of funding research projects angered leaders of the Senate Armed Services Committee, including chairman Sam Nunn (D-GA) and ranking Republican John Warner (R-VA).

"What makes this most objectionable," said Nunn, is the "explicit" wording in the bill that ruled out any competition for the funds. Like other senators, Nunn said he was annoyed by the fact that "we have not had a chance to study" the details. The earmarking language in the bill, he said, "is a little bit like those Russian dolls that contain smaller dolls inside. You keep finding more earmarkings as you keep reading and looking behind the provisions." Both Nunn and Warner were so outraged that they voted to kill the entire Defense bill rather than acquiesce in this game. They were joined by a score of other dissenters, but lost in the final vote on 23 November, 66-29.

The result was a defeat for strict peer review, but passage of the bill was nevertheless not entirely bad for science. For one thing, the bill assured the National Science Foundation (NSF) that it will get just about all the money requested by the Administration this year. The piece of its budget that was missing until last week was \$105 million for the Antarctic research program. Congress had left it out of the NSF appropriation, arguing that it should come from Defense because it would be at least partly used to clean up an environmental mess inherited from the Navy. The Defense bill now calls upon the Pentagon to hand over the \$105 million. But there's a hitch. To comply with arcane new budget

rules, NSF must reciprocate by cutting its research budget by at least \$5 million. And it could be more: Another \$70 million must be cut from NSF or from housing programs at the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The Administration will decide where to take the cuts this month.

The earmarked projects, though only a tiny fraction of the \$271-billion defense bill, took up more time in the debate than any other item. The problem, Senator Albert Gore (D-TN) pointed out, is that they may result in an inefficient use of scarce federal science dollars. Some may actually disrupt other well-made plans. For example, Gore zeroed in on a clause saying that

\$25 million of the \$150-million Strategic Environmental Research and Development Program had to be used "to support the Arctic Region Supercomputing Center." The center will be located in Alaska, home of Senator Ted Stevens, ranking Republican on the defense appropriations subcommittee. Gore pointed out that the environmental program has a science advisory board and a "carefully balanced governing council" to "create an atmosphere as objective as we could make it." But now, Congress has earmarked one-sixth of the budget for "one particular institution" and "one particular kind of research that has not been examined by any of the members of this science advisory council."

During the debate, senators clashed on many other cases as well: a \$1-million grant for an "earth science information network" whose "mysterious location" Gore could not discover; \$10 million for a neuroscience center of excellence at Louisiana State University; \$7.7 million for aeronautics research at Kansas State

University; \$29 million for undefined research at Boston University; and many others.

While earmarking by the appropriations committees has drawn flak in the past 2 years, especially from members of the authorizing committees, who see it as an intrusion on their turf, the prospects for change are not great. Patricia Warren, executive director of the Higher Education Colloquium on Science Facilities, says the underlying problem is that there's no ready alternative for building new science facilities at universities. The Colloquium would like to see Congress create competitive programs at every R&D agency to finance new academic research facilities. Until that happens, she says, the porkbarrel trend will "continue to increase." ■ ELIOT MARSHALL

Institution	Appropriation (\$ Millions)
Louisiana State University	10.0
Marywood College, PA	10.0
U. Texas at Austin	6.0
Northeastern University	6.0
Texas Regional Inst. for Environmental Studies	5.0
Kansas State University	7.7
U. Wisconsin	1.6
Boston University	29.0
Medical College of Ohio	0.25
U. South Carolina	0.5
George Mason University	0.75
Monmouth College, NJ	2.3
U. Minnesota	10.0
U. St. Thomas in St. Paul, MN	0.5
Brandeis University	2.0
New Mexico State University	3.0
Arctic Region Supercomputing Center	25.0
Total	119.6

SOURCE: CONGRESSIONAL RECORD

effort to measure vitamin levels in the blood and see how they relate to several diseases.

A particularly important piggyback study will be carried out in Britain on the effect of hormone replacement therapy. New hormone formulations for post-menopausal women include progestrogens as well as estrogens. According to Phil Hannaford, a

general practitioner and epidemiologist at the Royal College of General Practitioners' Manchester Research Unit, who is coordinating the study, "Added progestrogens might reduce the risk of cancer of the womb associated with estrogens, but might themselves increase the risk of heart problems." With data from the new study, they will have

a chance to work out the overall risk factors.

Some patience will be needed before the answers begin to come in. It will be "7 or 8 years from now," says Riboli, before European doctors will be able to start lecturing their patients on the cancer risks that come with English sausages or on the benefits of Italian olive oil. ■ JEREMY CHERFAS