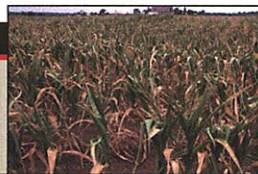


Fuel cells for your laptop?



New ways to beat drought



Bringing back northeast fisheries



working out agreements amicably, he reports, although he is still waiting to hear from MIT and California. He declined to comment on specific fees but stated firmly that “any commercial use” of the mouse “does require a license from DuPont.”

—ELIOT MARSHALL

NSF REAUTHORIZATION

Community Hails Bill To Double Budget

Science lobbyists have spent the past 4 years trying to get equal treatment for the National Science Foundation (NSF). They have been urging Congress to do for NSF what it is doing for the National Institutes of Health: double its budget, now \$4.8 billion, over 5 years. Last week, they achieved a symbolic victory when Representative Sherwood (Sherry) Boehlert (R-NY), chair of the House Committee on Science, introduced a bill (H.R. 4664) that aims to accomplish just that.

The bill faces a long and uncertain trip through the congressional labyrinth. But it includes a provision that could have a more immediate impact on the agency and perhaps even on the controversial practice of congressional earmarks. It requires NSF to rank proposed major new research facilities so that legislators will no longer feel free to pick and choose from among approved but unfunded projects, which circle expectantly like planes arriving at a crowded airport.

Boehlert, a self-professed “cheerleader” for NSF, has long resisted the doubling argument, scorning it as the product of “randomly generated numbers” (*Science*, 11

May 2001, p. 1048). Instead, he has urged the community to spell out exactly what is needed and how much it will cost. Last week, however, Boehlert joined ranks with his admiring constituency. Leading the biggest science pep rally in years, the chair declared that NSF needs annual increases of 15% for the next 5 years if it is to succeed in bolstering basic research and education.

Asked why he had changed his mind, Boehlert said that “there’s a certain appeal to having a lofty goal. ... I would have asked for a tripling [of NSF’s budget], but I wanted to be realistic.”

Even before Boehlert took to the microphone, scores of scientific societies papered the Capitol Hill venue with press releases praising him for his “leadership and vision” in calling for more federal dollars. NSF director Rita Colwell, although obliged by her position to support the president’s request for a meager 5% boost next year, nevertheless calls the bill a “terrific show of bipartisan support by Congress.”

Despite the euphoria, congressional aides and lobbyists acknowledge that the bill is just a small step in a long legislative process. Although the House is likely to back the bill, no version has yet been introduced in the Senate. And even a full congressional endorsement won’t generate a penny more for NSF unless another set of legislators, who sit on the appropriations committees that control NSF’s purse strings, climb onboard.

The science committee can play a bigger role in the other major component of the bill: compelling the NSF director to rank the importance of proposed facilities. Currently, the agency’s governing body, the National Science Board, says “yea” or “nay” to specific projects without indicating priorities.

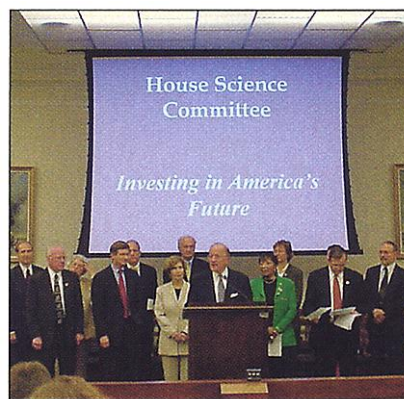
That process works fairly well when NSF has enough money to do everything. But when money’s tight, some approved projects get left out of NSF’s budget request. Last year that led to a free-for-all, with backers of specific pro-

jects seeking congressional help to move up in the queue (*Science*, 27 July 2001, p. 586). These so-called earmarks are an unwarranted intrusion into scientific peer review, say many legislators. If NSF ranks its big-ticket items, says Representative Nick Smith (R-MI), who chairs the committee’s research panel, that “would be a huge step toward making better decisions.” The president’s science adviser, John Marburger, also thinks it’s a good idea: “Any process that establishes priorities for funding is good,” he says.

Colwell agrees that such an exercise is important, and she notes that the bill “leaves priority-setting in the hands of the director, which is most appropriate.” But sources say she views any mandatory sharing of those rankings with Congress as an encroachment on her prerogatives as a

member of the executive branch. Colwell declined to elaborate, saying that “I’d prefer not to comment on pending legislation.”

—JEFFREY MERVIS



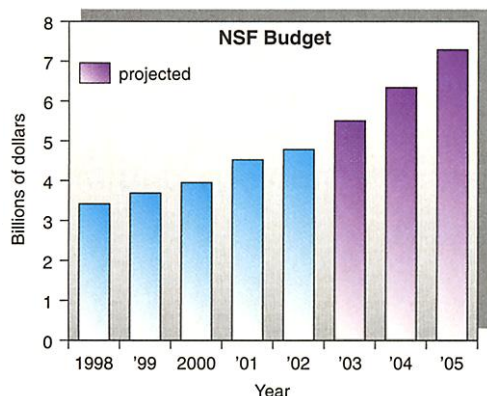
Out in force. Representative Sherry Boehlert, at podium, and other legislators are enveloped by science lobbyists at a press conference unveiling the NSF bill.

U.S. ANTITERRORISM

Panel Would Screen Foreign Scholars

The U.S. government is putting another brick in the wall to shore up homeland security. This one is intended to prevent foreign terrorists from masquerading as researchers.

Last week White House officials unveiled a proposal to create a panel that would screen foreign graduate students, postdocs, and scientists who apply for visas to study “sensitive topics ... uniquely available” on U.S. campuses. The proposal comes as a relief to higher education officials, who had feared a more intrusive policy that would dampen the flow of foreign students and scholars. “This is an excellent framework for protecting national security, although many details remain to be spelled out,” says Terry Hartl of the American Council on Education, which has followed the issue closely. “They seem to be fairly



Bigger bumps. The House bill would boost NSF’s allowed budget by 15% a year for 3 years, a much larger jump than in recent years.

CREDITS: (TOP TO BOTTOM) ASTRA; SOURCE: NSF