... but gives \$30m back to NSF

THE US Senate agreed on Monday to restore \$30 million of the \$44 million which the House of Representatives had earlier cut from the research budget of the National Science Foundation for the fiscal year 1978.

The Senate Appropriations Committee had recommended that \$40 m be restored, in line with the sum that the Senate had already authorised. This would have brought the NSF's budget to \$927 m, only \$7 m less than the amount requested by the administration.

However, Senator William Proxmire, Chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee responsible for the NSF budget, introduced an amendment to the Appropriations Bill during the debate on the floor of the Senate on Monday afternoon cutting 2% off the total budget of all agencies covered by the bill.

Initially the cut would have been across the board, thus reducing the NSF budget by a further \$20 m from the total recommended by the Appropriations Committee. But the amendment as finally passed by the Senate distributed the cuts between the different agencies covered by the bill in such a way that the NSF budget was

reduced by only \$10 m, leaving it up to the foundation to decide where the cuts should come.

The House, in appropriating only \$893.9 million—\$44 million less than had been requested by the administration—had made a number of cuts in the foundation's new Applied Science and Research Applications (ASRA) directorate, much of whose work, it had claimed, should be carried out by other government departments. The Senate committee, however, apparently convinced of ASRA's potential, recommended that \$67 million be appropriated for it, an increase of \$9.1 million on funds currently available for the NSF's applied research programme, and only \$6.9 million less than the total initially requested.

The committee, however, in its report on the appropriations bill, expressed concern that ASRA's emphasis upon "integrated basic research" should not become a means of diverting funds from applied to basic research, and directed the NSF "to take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that funds administered by the ASRA directorate are not channelled into pure basic research".

David Dickson

Departments urged to support basic research

DR Frank Press, director of President Carter's Office of Science and Technology Policy, and Mr James T. McIntyre, director of the Office of Management and Budget, have written to the heads of all federal departments and agencies asking them to give 'careful consideration' to support of basic research in drawing up their budget proposals for the fiscal year 1980.

Mr McIntyre has already indicated that there is likely to be a "growth pause" in the 1980 budget, whose target deficit has recently been reduced from \$60.5 billion to \$43.5 billion due to growing concern about the effects of inflation.

In a memorandum to agency heads, the two presidential advisers say that "despite these tight constraints, we believe that it is important to re-emphasize the administration's concern for the funding of basic research".

They stress that it is the policy of the administration to assure effective support of basic or long-term research, particularly to provide a better basis for decision making or for dealing with long-term national problems.

Support for such moves has also come from the National Science Board, the policy-making body of the National

Science Foundation. In a report on *Basic Research in the Mission Agencies* which was presented to Congress by President Carter last week, the report states boldly that "basic research is useful", and emphasises that basic research has produced and continues to produce significant additions to scientific knowledge that are, or promise to be, of high potential in addressing national problems and concerns.

The report says that, in the main, mission agencies acknowledge payoffs from their investments in basic research, and points out that although there has been a 25-fold increase in current dollar terms in the amount of basic research performed in universities in the period 1953 to 1977, the performance of basic research by industry has increased by only 5 times over this period.

Dr Grover E. Murray, vice chairman of the National Science Board and chairman of the committee responsible for the report, said last week that "as a result of this review of the agencies and their activities, the board affirms its strong belief in the value of multiple support of scientific research by the federal government and in the key role of the mission agencies". □

Rogers proposes commission on research ethics

REPRESENTATIVE Paul Rogers, who has been responsible for much recent US health research legislation, has introduced a bill into the House of Representatives to set up a presidential commission for the study of ethical problems in medicine and biomedical and behavioural sciences.

The commission would include health professionals, biomedical and behavioural research workers, as well as non-specialists in these areas, and would require all executive agencies to provide pertinent information requested by the chairman.

The commission would be required to conduct studies of the legal, ethical and social implications of a number of specific issues, including the allocation of federal resources for biomedical and behavioural research and health care delivery, the requirements and guidelines applicable to clinical trials, counselling and testing for genetic diseases, and developments in *in vitro*

Rogers: grappling with dilemmas.

fertilisation.

It would succeed the present National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioural Research, which has more narrowly defined responsibilities, and will go out of existence at the end of October. Six weeks ago the Senate passed a resolution sponsored by, among others, Senator Edward Kennedy which would extend the life of the present commission for a further four years.

Introducing his bill in the House last week on behalf of members of the health and environment subcommittee of the House of commerce committee, Mr Rogers said that ethical problems connected with research on human subjects still exist. The US was grappling with many very difficult ethical dilemmas in medical practice