

# Presidential candidates find a little time for science

- Attitudes to SDI, AIDS, separate candidates
- Space exploration still catches voters

## Washington & Boston

WITH Vice-President George Bush's choice of Senator Dan Quayle as his running mate at the Republican Party Convention in New Orleans last week, the battle lines for the November US presidential election are finally drawn.

Scientists can be sure of one thing: scientific issues will not play a direct part in deciding whether George Bush or Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis will become the next president of the United States. But scientific interests do lie behind two of the three key issues — the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), AIDS and abortion — on which the candidates have very different views.

In the Democratic platform, science does not rate more than a passing mention. The Republicans, in contrast, give science and technology a full-page treatment and pledge support for all of the big projects — including the superconducting supercollider and increased funding for the National Science Foundation — linked with President Ronald Reagan's administration. But Bush has yet to make science the subject of a campaign speech.

Space exploration, the single scientific subject likely to capture the voters' imagination, has rated that honour. Bush is a supporter of the space station and, speaking at NASA's Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama, earlier this month, he said he would consider backing a manned mission to Mars.

That did not stop Dukakis, speaking at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center last Thursday from blaming the Republicans for letting the US space programme slide. Dukakis repeated his new-found support for the space station.

That support had emerged just as his running mate, Texas Senator Lloyd Bentsen, visited NASA's Houston Space Flight Center. With the massive Houston centre in his home state, Bentsen has been a long-time friend of NASA and has pushed for extra funds while a member of the Congressional committee that oversees space activities.

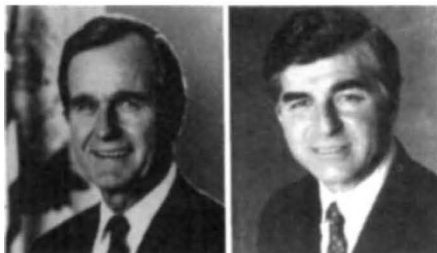
Dukakis has been equivocal about the space station. His hand was finally forced when, last week, Congress agreed to provide \$900 million for the space station in fiscal 1989. As half the funds could be vetoed by a new president, a group of congressmen pressed Dukakis to make his views clear.

Dukakis's attitude to the space station

now appears to differ from Bush's only in where he would find the funds to support it. Dukakis claims this can be paid for by cuts in the defence budget, particularly in funding for SDI.

On SDI, Bush and Dukakis find an issue on which they differ clearly. Bush has pledged to continue funds for the programme, but without Reagan's near-zealous support, many suspect that SDI may languish even in a Bush administration. Some indication of a new direction for SDI came from Senator Bob Dole at the Republican convention, when he spoke of the system as one that protected against an accidental missile launch, rather than as a defensive shield in a full-scale nuclear war. But Bush is running on the platform of continuing SDI.

Dukakis has repeatedly opposed SDI.



Presidential candidates — George Bush and Michael Dukakis.

In a speech on 14 June to the Atlanta Council in Washington, DC, Dukakis said "We don't need the Strategic Defense Initiative, we need the Conventional Defense Initiative". He also voiced opposition to several other pet Republican defence projects, including the rail-mobile MX missile.

The SDI programme is, however, so institutionalized that it may be hard to scrap. Research and development may continue, even if on a reduced scale. Dukakis's call for a Conventional Defense Initiative centres on his endorsement of a proposal by Joseph Nye, professor at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, for a beefed-up conventional defence in Europe. Nye is a candidate for Secretary of Defense in a Dukakis administration.

Dukakis has also said that money taken from military research projects could be used to strengthen civilian research and that he will appoint a science adviser who will report directly to him. One person tipped for the job is Lewis Branscomb, former IBM chief scientist and now director of Science, Technology and Public

Policy Program at the Kennedy School of Government.

On the controversial topic of AIDS, both Democrat and Republican candidates claim they will spend whatever it costs to develop new drugs. Both party platforms specifically call for expedited FDA approval of new AIDS drugs. But on how to contain AIDS and treat its victims, big differences emerge.

While Bush has confessed difficulties in following scientific issues, Dukakis has emerged with an image as a successful 'technocrat', thanks to the highly touted 'Massachusetts Miracle' — a mainstay of Dukakis's campaign speeches. Massachusetts is second only to California in the number of high-technology companies it has attracted. Boston's route 128 — 'America's Technology Highway' — is a key computer business centre.

But critics of the Dukakis administration say he does not deserve much of the credit for the economic success of Massachusetts. One report issued almost a year ago charted the major role of military research and development monies in the state's success. And much credit must go to the many top universities and research institutes in the Boston area.

While Dukakis has the image of a technocrat, it is Bush who has offered something concrete to small high-technology business. He has been vocal in support of the permanent extension of the research and development tax credits scheduled for elimination in 1988. The Democrats remain silent on the issue.

On environmental issues, the Democrats have the better image. Bush has recently begun to try to change this, talking more forcefully about ocean dumping and acid rain. He also switched policy on offshore oil drilling, an issue on which he had angered Californians.

For Dukakis, environmental issues have always played a strong role in his rhetoric, if not in his actual policies. Dukakis is now calling for initiatives that go far beyond those of Bush in cleaning up the environment. But while he has made strong statements about ocean dumping and protection of the coastline, Boston Harbor, the most polluted in the nation, remains a large thorn in his side.

Dukakis has taken a tough-sounding stance on acid rain and has called for strict national standards to cut emissions of sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide. In Massachusetts, however, environmentalists claim that Dukakis has done little to support new state smog-control plans.

Dukakis's backing for environmental issues has also led him to oppose strongly the Seabrook nuclear power plant. He has been a critic of the nuclear power industry in general, but has not publicly opposed nuclear power outright. In contrast, Bush has been a consistent supporter of nuclear power. **Alun Anderson & Seth Shulman**