

Senators warn of changing climate for research

Washington. The chairman of the Senate subcommittee responsible for approving a large proportion of the annual US science budget suggested last week that, as industry is the main "customer" for much university-based research, industrial representatives should play a greater role in deciding how federal research funds are distributed.

The suggestion came from Senator Jay Rockefeller (Democrat, West Virginia) who chairs the subcommittee on science, technology and space. He was speaking at a two-day meeting organized by the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), widely seen as part of the preparation for an anticipated presidential white paper on how the United States can maintain its world leadership in basic science.

Rockefeller suggested that industry might increase its influence over the science budget through, for example, greater

representation on groups such as the National Science Board, the body that oversees the National Science Foundation (NSF). He also warned that if the US Senate votes on 22 February in favour of an amendment to the Constitution requiring the United States to balance its budget — as the House of Representatives has already done — the move could mean the end for new science projects.

The OSTP meeting provided an opportunity for more than a hundred researchers from academic institutions and industry to come together with the heads of most of the federal science agencies to talk about the importance of unfettered, curiosity-driven research.

Unsurprisingly, the scientists' main message was that the scientific enterprise needs more money. But the members of Congress who attended the meeting brought a different message, namely that future funding for science will depend on its success in creating jobs. This, for example, was the main theme of an address by Senator Barbara A. Mikulski (Democrat, Maryland) whose subcommittee controls the budgets of a number of science-based agencies, including the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and the NSF.

Barbara Culliton



Mikulski

Clinton budget proposes science funding freeze

Washington. Small increases in science funding for the 1995 fiscal year, which starts this October, were proposed by President Bill Clinton when he presented his second budget to Congress on Monday (7 February). But the increases will be sufficient only to keep up with the anticipated rate of inflation.

The National Science Foundation (NSF) fares well in the submission, and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) less so, while both the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the Department of Energy face substantial cuts in parts of their research programmes.

The biggest increases will go to research related to new civilian technology initiatives, such as the planned 'information superhighway'. As a result, funding for applied research will rise slightly more than that for basic research.

The president proposes a 3.7 per cent increase in the federal research and development budget in 1995 compared to 1994 (excluding new research facilities in each case) to just over \$71 billion (see table). But after deep cuts in funding for new facilities, the increase would be only 2.7 per cent, probably close to the rate of inflation.

The proposed increases come as part of the first budget in which the total amount of 'discretionary spending' — that which the federal government is not obliged to make under the law — has been frozen in dollar terms by congressional decree. John Gibbons, the president's science adviser, says the increases therefore show that Clinton is "willing to cut other programmes to pay for research and development".

But Congress has yet to make its mark on the budget. And as proposed cuts in such politically sensitive areas as public housing work their way through the House of Representatives and the Senate, the modest increase for science is likely to be driven substantially below the expected rate of inflation.

The budget proposes no shift in the balance between civil and military research, with the latter still consuming 53 per cent of the total. Officials say spending has moved more quickly than planned in favour of civil research during Clinton's first year, and that the administra-

tion is still aiming for parity between the two by 1998. But liberals will be dismayed that Clinton plans to increase defence research at the same 4 per cent rate as health research.

Technology transfer programmes organized by the National Institute of Standards and Technology — part of the Commerce Department — get the sharpest boost of all, jumping from \$490 million this year to \$874 million in 1995, and programmes in various agencies related to the information superhighway being promoted by Vice-President Al Gore will rise from \$964 million to \$1,272 million.

Co-operative Research and Development Agreements (CRADAs) between government laboratories and private industry are also singled out for expansion.

Colin Macilwain

NSF still keeps favoured agency status

Monday's budget proposals have confirmed the favoured status that the NSF enjoys under the Clinton administration. In particular, the NSF is the only federal agency whose entire workload is identified by science adviser Jack Gibbons as a "priority area".

The administration has requested a 6 per cent increase in NSF's overall funding, which will reach \$3.2 billion in the fiscal year beginning on 1 October, with the research component growing by more than 8 per cent to reach \$2.35 billion.

"It's a very good budget in a very tough budget year," says Neal Lane, the director of NSF, adding that the entire budget ►

Proposed increases by agency

Research and development (R&D): (Budget authority) \$ millions)	1994 enacted	1995 proposed	% Change 1994 to 1995
Defense	35,538	36,971	4%
Health and Human Services (NIH)	11,033 (10,486)	11,484 (10,994)	4% (5%)
Commerce	919	1,204	31%
NSF	2,026	2,220	10%
NASA	8,493	8,597	1%
Transportation	617	692	12%
EPA	536	582	9%
Agriculture	1,393	1,394	0%
Energy	6,054	6,052	-0%
Other	1,876	1,833	-2%
Total R&D	68,484	71,029	4%

(Figures exclude fundings for research facilities)