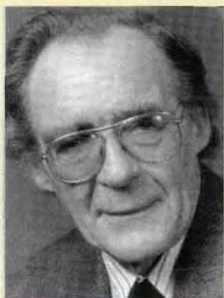


Maddox to step down from editor's chair at *Nature*

London. Sir John Maddox (below), editor of *Nature* for 22 of the past 29 years, will retire "on or around" his seventieth birthday in November.

Macmillan Magazines Ltd, the publisher of *Nature*, says that it has already held discussions with a number of potential successors. The company hopes that Maddox will continue to be involved in the development of the journal after his retirement.

Maddox was first appointed editor of *Nature* in 1966, having started his professional career in 1949 as a lecturer in theoretical physics at the University of Manchester. He then became science correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* and, later, coordinator of the Nuffield Science Teaching Project.



During his first spell as editor, the circulation of the journal doubled, to 22,000. He was director of the Nuffield Foundation from 1975 to 1980, when he returned to *Nature* and has since helped to build the number of subscribers — in particular by substantially increasing its international circulation — to 56,000. He was knighted in the New Year Honours list in January this year.

"When John Maddox goes, it is bound to seem like the end of an era, but everyone hopes that his ongoing involvement [with *Nature*] will make the transition a seamless one," Nicholas Byam Shaw, the chairman of Macmillan, said on Monday.

Maddox says he intends to stay "very active", and, while maintaining links to the journal, he is also looking forward to doing "something quite different". He is currently writing a book on what science has yet to discover — and says that "it might even be fun to teach a physics course again".

Maddox says that his main regret on vacating the editor's chair is that because it has provided him with "an automatic way of keeping up to date" he will have to work harder. In addition to his academic and journalistic career, he is an elected member of the Gwenddyr and Crickadarn Community Council in Powys, South Wales. □

State university system sees 'devastating' cuts

Washington. Researchers at the State University of New York (SUNY), the largest public university system in the United States, are bracing themselves for budget cuts of up to one-third which, they fear, could undermine the university's status as a major research institution.

The threat to the US\$340 million research programmes carried out each year at SUNY has received less publicity than other threats facing the system's 400,000 students — and their parents. But faculty members at the university's major research campuses, at Buffalo and Stony Brook, expect that the anticipated cuts will hit research by raising the cost of taking on graduate students, preventing good staff from obtaining tenure and encouraging a flight of existing staff from the system.

George Pataki, the recently elected Republican governor of New York state, has put forward a budget that would drastically cut the state government's direct contribution to SUNY, reducing it from \$970 million to \$680 million next year. The governor is believed to have hit the university hard because he feels that, in contrast to other 'services' such as public schools or the sewage system, the university can raise revenues by increasing student tuition fees.

Once all revenue sources have been included, SUNY's income is about US\$3 billion a year. The proposed US\$290 million cut therefore represents a reduction of 10 per cent. Last week, Frederic Salerno, a telecommunications executive who chairs the SUNY board of trustees, said the cuts would "devastate" the university. "Another

course of action must be found," he said.

Pataki is expected to agree a budget with the Democrat-controlled state assembly and the Republican senate by 1 April. The state has previously allowed this deadline to slip for weeks or even months. But Pataki says he will shut down the state government if he does not get a budget by the agreed date, and the final figure is expected to be close to the governor's proposal.

SUNY's strongest political support has traditionally come from the Republican senators who represent upstate New York, where many of the system's 60-odd campuses are located. But party loyalty has obliged them to support Pataki's budget in public. It has been left to Democrats such as Steven Englebright, a Long Island assemblyman who is also a geologist with SUNY at Stony Brook, to attack it. "This would destroy the university," says Englebright, adding that the cuts will encourage the best existing faculty to leave, and make it impossible to recruit replacements.

SUNY's \$340 million research programme makes it one of the largest research universities in the United States, spending about the same as the University of Michigan, Stanford or Cornell (although the University of California system spends more than twice as much across all its campuses). Half of SUNY's \$340 million goes on biomedical research, and most of the rest on chemistry, physics, engineering and environmental sciences.

Staff say that, like public university systems in Massachusetts and other northeastern states, SUNY suffers a widespread ►

Congress promises a bleak future for research

Washington. The current squeeze on research budgets is unlikely to be a short-lived affair, if a committee of the US House of Representatives has its way. Last week, the House Budget Committee voted to cut US\$100 billion from federal agency budgets over the next five years, in order to off-set promised tax cuts.

To demonstrate that such a reduction is feasible, the committee has published a 45-page list of what it calls "illustrative Republican spending cuts". Although these are only suggestions — the budgets of individual agencies are decided by committees in the House and Senate — they show which programmes Republican leaders believe to be expendable.

Among the recommendations are a 5 per cent reduction in research funding for the National Institutes of Health, and scaling back and delaying the National

Aeronautics and Space Administration's proposed Earth Observing System (EOS). Some of the ideas, such as eliminating the Department of Energy and the National Biological Survey are not new. But committee members seem to have changed their minds about an earlier suggestion; rather than scrapping the US Geological Survey complete, the agency is now only targeted for "significant reforms".

Appropriations committees are, in principle, free to follow these guidelines if they choose — or to ignore them. But if the \$100 billion reduction is approved by Congress within the next few months, the committees will have to find the cuts somewhere. And the budget committee plans another five-year spending reduction — this time because of the federal deficit, and up to four times as large — in May.

Tony Reichhardt

perception that students go to private universities if they can. In other parts of the United States — notably in the midwestern states — public universities are held in greater esteem and therefore they have wider political support.

Jim Kalas, associate provost for research at SUNY, says the cuts will hit research in three ways: the general atmosphere of retrenchment will encourage the best faculty to leave; \$27 million used to support graduate students will fund fewer students at higher tuition fees; and there will be no money for new equipment and buildings.

The SUNY board of trustees has drawn up a list of campus and programme closures to meet the Pataki cut. But it has not released it, on the grounds that closure threats would become self-fulfilling. Two-thirds of the \$290 million would be found, the board said, by raising tuition fees by 60 per cent.

By publishing its views on the governor's proposal last week, the board hopes to maximize its leverage in the budget process. Its fears received front page coverage in the state's largest newspaper, *Newsday*. But Pataki appears to be unmoved, and SUNY officials are privately resigned to a cut of at least US\$200 million. **Colin Macilwain**

... as NSF asked how knife could fall

Washington. The US National Science Foundation (NSF) and its governing board have been asked by a House of Representatives subcommittee how it might absorb a 20 per cent cut in its US\$3.3 billion budget for the fiscal year 1996, starting on 1 October.

The request was made last week by Jerry Lewis (Republican, California), chairman of the House appropriations subcommittee for Veterans' Affairs, Housing and Urban Development and independent agencies (VA-HUD), to Neal Lane, director of NSF, and Frank Rhodes, chairman of the National Science Board.

Lewis is not yet proposing a 20 per cent cut at the NSF, he said later, but he is asking the foundation to say what it would do to achieve such a cut. Similar requests were being made to other agencies covered by the subcommittee, which is responsible for \$70 billion — more than a quarter of all non-military money controlled by Congress. Earlier, he had pointed out that NSF's budget had grown by 10 per cent since last year, but he also expressed concern that "very often, science is an easy target for cuts".

In reply, Rhodes told Lewis that the National Science Board, which meets this week, was prepared to help the House set priorities for the NSF. But he said later that he had interpreted Lewis's request as concerning options for 20 per cent savings spread over several years.

But Lewis and his staff say they want ideas on how such a cut could be made in the 1996 budget — and that they need pro-

NIH to review priorities in readiness for future cuts . . .

Washington. Faced by inevitable cuts in spending over the next five years — regardless of which political party is in power — the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) are to carry out a wide-ranging review of biomedical research in the United States.

"We will talk to all the universities, to find out how they want biomedical research to look by the year 2000," Harold Varmus, director of the NIH, said in testimony before a congressional committee last week.

Varmus was responding to remarks by John Porter (Republican, Illinois), chairman of the House of Representatives appropriations subcommittee on labour, health and human services, who had just explained that increased spending on health-care and welfare is squeezing out even the highest priority discretionary programmes.

The NIH budget, which stands at \$11.2 billion this year, with President Bill Clinton having requested \$11.8 billion for next year, is part of this discretionary spending. Last

week's hearing was the first of many at which the NIH will defend the new request.

There is support from both Republicans and Democrats for the NIH's budget, and from Porter in particular, and the institutes are unlikely to be in a worse position under the Republicans than they were before. Porter's subcommittee organized a hearing two weeks ago at which a number of Nobel prize-winners explained the advances that they had made with government support, and the significance of their work to the well-being of the United States today.

The hearing was held partly to put on the record arguments that Republicans wishing to defend the NIH budget will be able to use. But it also gave Porter an opportunity to explain the exigencies of the current budget crisis. He repeated these last week, prompting acknowledgement of the situation from Varmus and his promise that the NIH would examine how biomedical research should accommodate cuts in funding.

Last week, the House Budget Committee entered the fray with its proposal to cut \$100 billion from discretionary funds at 1995 levels over the next five years (see previous page). The NIH would decide the priorities for these cuts, the committee said.

But such priorities would need to be defended. And as Varmus discovered last week, when it comes to specific programmes, agreement between the parties can rapidly break down. Jay Dickey (Republican, Arkansas) asked Varmus how he justified "research into lung cancer and AIDS, diseases brought on by people's own behaviour". Dickey said he needed such justification for the voters in his home constituency.

Varmus argued that behaviour can play a part in most diseases. But Dickey replied that this was not the case in rheumatoid arthritis, and then asked what the NIH was doing about heart disease, an area of research he clearly supports.

Led by Henry Bonilla (Republican, Texas), the subcommittee then became embroiled in a discussion about how many people are killed by AIDS in comparison to other diseases. Bonilla eventually asked Varmus why AIDS is so contentious both among the public and among researchers; it took Varmus a moment of reflection to understand the question, which he then carefully circumnavigated.

To judge by what subcommittee members said, the hearing suggested AIDS research may run into opposition. Yet most of the committee had voted to restore funding for AIDS research cut from the 1995 budget earlier this year. Last week's hearing was the beginning of a long road; as yet, it is hard to see where it is going. **Helen Gavaghan**

Colin Macilwain