

House Deletes NSF Budget in Political Move

Amid tense House debate over rules and the FY 1982 Omnibus Budget Authorizations package last week, a rumor spread claiming that the controversial Gramm-Latta amendment—which passed the day before—had killed the National Science Foundation. The rumor was not strictly true. But political jockeying on June 26 at the behest of House Republicans will impose closer scrutiny on proposed research expenditures and will probably lower ceilings on research spending.

"We don't really know what happened up on the Hill, clearly, yet," admits NSF spokesman, Ralph Kazarian. It's a refrain that echoed throughout the science establishment in Washington this week as word of the newest twist in Reagan administration budget maneuvering sent the research community reeling. NSF was not the only agency affected. Also eliminated from the omnibus authorizations package passed by the House were funds for research conducted by the Environmental Protection Agency, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and Federal Aviation Administration.

The powerful, newly formed coalition of House Republicans and conservative Democrats "didn't want to wipe out U.S. research," explains Stan Schneider of the President's Office of Science and Technology Policy; what it wanted was an opportunity to consider affected research-authorizations budgets separately. But as long as they were included in the omnibus authorizations package, that wasn't possible.

Rules given the authorizations package limited floor debate on the bill to consideration of a single amendment—one introduced by Phil Gramm (D-Tex.) and Delbert Latta (R-Ohio). Among changes that the amendment included were deletions for all NSF authorizations and for research at EPA, NOAA and FAA. While passage of the Gramm-Latta initiative offered Reagan budget carvers a sweet victory, it can only bode ill for programs funded under the currently deleted budgets.

The huge omnibus authorizations package contained so many contentious excisions that no Representative could vote for it without fear of offending many constituents. However, the lumping of so many different programs into a single package offered eventual sponsors a good alibi: A delegate could explain that voting for the entire package was a necessary evil to assure that funding for some locally important program was not lost. And because the Rules Committee limited amendments to the package, delegates could easily beg off accountability on why they didn't fight harder to restore those programs affecting their constituents. But

that same inability to wildly amend the package on the House floor also would have preserved the already severely pared-down research budgets from further program cuts.

Deletion of these budgets from the omnibus authorizations package was no accident, OSTP's Schneider says. "It provides an opportunity for people to either make more cuts or for those opposing the cuts to put them back in."

"It seems to me unlikely that this is a strategy designed to strengthen or increase the NSF budget," says John Crowley, the director of Federal Relations for Science Research at the Association of American Universities. "I think that it's a reasonable assumption," and one based on history, "that if [the NSF budget] requires a separate consideration on the House floor, we may see significant attempts to cut it, perhaps deeply."

From the view of Reagan budget planners, NSF's authorizations package may indeed appear too plump. The House Science and Technology Committee offered up a package \$127 million higher than the figure requested by the administration. "The Science and Technology Committee was able to do that simply because re-

ductions in other agencies offset the increases proposed for NSF," Crowley notes.

A "reconciliation" rule drafted by the Congressional Budget Office and sent to committees this year, offered those committees for the first time an opportunity to obtain a "credit" if they limited spending in programs for which they had budget responsibility to a level set by CBO. For the House Science and Technology Committee, that limit represented a \$78 million cut from current-policy spending levels. But even after restoring \$127 million to NSF's authorizations, the Science and Technology Committee was able to reduce the aggregate spending it had proposed (for all federal programs over which it had jurisdiction) by \$1.5 million more than the \$78 million requested. But its credit earning may prove to have been in vain when separate budget authorizations for NSF and the other affected agencies hit the House floor later this year.

It is possible, too, that those bills will never make it to the floor. And then things could get even stickier. For instance, NSF could be held to a spending ceiling being proposed by the Senate—one approximately \$120 million lower than the House had been considering. □

Clues to Keyworth as science adviser

He calls himself science policy's "new man in town," but it's clear that he already knows his way around—at least around the Reagan administration's economic posture. George A. Keyworth II, in his first public appearance as Director-Designate of the Office of Science and Technology Policy, warned that federal R&D will be strongly influenced by today's economic conditions. He cited such things as an economic emergency, skyrocketing inflation and unnecessary and costly regulation and said, "My central premise is simply that we cannot continue to distribute our limited support of basic research without applying stringent and fundamental criteria, those of excellence and pertinence to national requirements being paramount." Keyworth was speaking in Washington at an R&D colloquium sponsored by the American Association for the Advancement of Science. His remarks offer clues to how he would function in the role of science adviser to the President (should he be confirmed by the Senate).

Keyworth says he has been assured that he will not need to act as an advocate of science and technology because the administration's strongest advocate of science and technology will be right next door in the Oval Office. In fact, Keyworth says, "nowhere is it indicated that the OSTP

or its director is to represent the interests of the science community as a constituency." Instead of being an "inside lobbyist" he would be an objective adviser who could act as an effective link between the science community and the White House. The role of lobbying for science, he says, "will continue to be a major challenge for the AAAS. I know it has been working hard to deal with this—to live up to the premise of its name to 'advance science.'"

Speaking of the advancement of basic research, Keyworth says, "Undoubtedly, our country has relinquished its preeminence in some scientific fields while others are strongly threatened through efforts in Europe, Japan, or the Soviet Union. It is no longer within our economic capability, nor perhaps even desirable, to aspire to primacy across the spectrum of scientific disciplines."

One area in which Keyworth does see a need for primacy, however, is national security. "I do believe," he says, "that our country's military might should be second to none—that this is essential today to world peace and to the survival of the free world. I also believe that science and technology play a key role in providing us with this strength, and I will work to see that we excel in this." □