

US research budget

Spending plan remains intact

Washington

CONGRESS left town last week for the first of several long recesses in this election year with a respectable share of work on the budget for the financial year beginning in October completed.

The administration has suffered few setbacks in its overall plan to increase basic science and military research, emphasizing the "hard" sciences and a few special pet projects — such as the Center for Advanced Materials at Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory. Congress has promoted a few pet projects of its own while keeping to a minimum its more public-spirited tinkering with the budget.

NSF: The National Science Foundation (NSF) will receive \$1,302 million for research and related activities, only \$6 million short of the administration request. Congress doubled the \$20 million that the Reagan Administration wanted for supercomputers, opening the way for the purchase of new machines or the establishment of national supercomputer centres — rather than simply facilitating the use of existing machines, as the administration had planned. The House-Senate compromise on the final version of the NSF bill made a special point of calling on NSF not to establish any such centre without competitive review of proposals — apparently a reaction to less high-minded handling of supercomputer centres in the Department of Energy budget (see below).

Congress also directed NSF to cut \$36 million from the programmes that the Reagan Administration has tended to favour in the past few years — physical sciences and engineering — at the expense of biological, behavioural and social sciences.

At the urging of Congress, outgoing NSF director Ed Knapp provided written assurance that 13,000 grants will be awarded next year.

Congress increased NSF's science education budget, a perennial target of the Reagan Administration, and in particular moved to maintain the present number of 600 NSF graduate fellowships. The annual stipend was increased to \$11,000 plus a tuition allowance of \$6,000.

Energy: The administration was only slightly less successful in getting its way in the energy budget. Congress for the most part went along with the Reagan plan to place less emphasis on applied research, particularly that concerned with solar and renewable energy, while building up basic research. In one area, magnetic fusion, Congress went one better than the administration, cutting that programme to \$420 million — an 11 per cent drop from present levels.

One setback to the administration was the refusal of Congress to appropriate construction funds for the planned

electron accelerator to be built at Newport News, Virginia, by the Southwestern Universities Research Association (see *Nature* 21 June, p.658). In place of construction funds, Congress allocated \$3.5 million for research and development and preliminary design work. Before coming back to Congress for construction funds, the Department of Energy will have to submit a five-year plan on nuclear physics that examines the possibility of dropping the project altogether.

The two projects that Congress inserted last year into the energy budget without the benefit of peer review — and which gave rise to cries of pork-barrel politics (see *Nature* 305, 659; 1983) — are back again; Catholic University will get \$9 million to continue work on its Vitreous State Laboratory, and Columbia University \$3 million for its "National Center for Chemical Research", also known as a chemistry building. Not to be left out, Representative Don Fuqua (Democrat, Florida), chairman of the House Science and Technology Committee, saw to it that \$7 million was allocated for a new supercomputer centre at Florida State University, in his home state.

The Center for Advanced Materials, presidential science adviser George Keyworth's showcase for government-industry cooperation through the national laboratories, will get \$11 million in construction funds as requested. Work on the Stanford Linear Collider will continue as planned.

Space: The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) will be given \$10 million more than the administration had intended for research analysis — \$7 million of which will go for planetary research and analysis — a modest response to the frequently-heard criticism that

NASA has promoted new projects at the expense of budgets needed to analyse data piling up from existing projects.

Congress agreed to provide \$150 million for research and development on the proposed space station, but in turn required that NASA should consider, as one alternative, that permanent manning of the station be phased in over a five-year period following the station's deployment. The Venus Radar Mapper, the Galileo mission to Jupiter, the gamma-ray observatory and the space telescope will proceed as planned. **Other:** The Environmental Protection Agency will receive a big increase in its research and development budget — \$193 million, a 35 per cent increase over the 1984 level. The administration had requested \$163 million for fiscal year 1985.

Neither the House nor the Senate has acted on the National Institutes of Health (NIH) appropriation. The Senate Appropriations Committee is expected to act quickly when Congress returns at the end of the month with a recommendation to increase the administration's request by \$587 million. The administration wanted \$4,342 million for NIH's research activities.

The agriculture budget, which was to have included a major new initiative on biotechnology as a vehicle for expanding the perpetually minuscule competitive grants programme, was given its usual treatment in the House by Appropriations Committee chairman Jamie Whitten (Democrat, Mississippi) (see *Nature* 14 June, p.574). The result was that while the overall total of research funds has changed very little from the administration's proposed 1 per cent increase over 1984, the competitive grants programme was once again slashed. The Senate, which has yet to act, is expected to look much more favourably on the administration's plan to bring the competitive grants programme up to \$50 million, from its current \$17 million. **Stephen Budiansky**

Soviet emigré case not resolved

PARTICIPANTS returning from the Federation of European Biochemical Societies (FEBS) Moscow meeting have reported further details about the case of Dr David Goldfarb, the Jewish biochemist (see *Nature*, 308, 766; 309, 104; 1984). Informants who were able to meet Dr Goldfarb say that, although he was promised an exit visa in February, he never received it, but was still waiting for the relevant documents at the time of the police search of his apartment in April. On the bacterial strains confiscated by the police, he said that he had already decided not to take them with him.

Unlike most "refusniks", Dr Goldfarb was still employed by a research institute until notified that he would receive a visa.

When Goldfarb resigned from the institute this spring, he took with him

examples of the strains he had developed in the 1960s for urine tests to determine metabolic disorders in children. He then decided, however, not to take the strains abroad with him, since this might create difficulties at the customs and because the strains had, in any case, been obtained from the United States and the United Kingdom. He says, however, that during his interrogation, a KGB official stated that he was under investigation both for trying to take the strains out of the country and for disseminating hostile propaganda.

Dr Goldfarb's present status is unclear. Many of the FEBS participants say they raised the subject with Academician Yuri Ovchinnikov and received encouraging answers. However, Ovchinnikov seems to have given no definite commitment that Goldfarb would receive a visa. Vera Rich