

Japanese plan for doubling of public science spending

Tokyo. Japan's public sector spending on science and technology will nearly double within four years if a resolution endorsed by a committee within the ruling coalition's strongest party, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), is adopted by the government. Implementation of the new resolution would fulfil a promise made in 1992 to double science spending by the turn of the century.

The resolution, agreed at a meeting of a recently formed LDP advisory committee on science and technology, calls for the national government to increase annual spending on science and technology to ¥4,660 billion (US\$43.7 billion) by the end of the decade, 1.7 times current spending. Under the plan, research funds will double to ¥2,460 billion, funds for personnel development and exchanges will quadruple to ¥120 billion, and funds for basic infrastructure and maintenance treble to ¥585 billion.

An LDP spokesman says a joint declaration formally adopting the resolution is expected from all the coalition's parties next month. The committee that passed this resolution has also been charged with advising the party's executive on framing the Basic Science and Technology Plan, formulation of which is required under a new science and technology law passed late last year (see *Nature* 378, 227; 1995).

Omi Koji, the LDP member responsible for drafting the law, is also playing a leading role in the new committee. He and other LDP politicians have managed to increase funding for science and technology despite the continuing recession and the government's commitment to cover the enormous losses of failed financial institutions.

During the drafting of the new plan for science, the committee heard from Susumu Tonegawa, joint winner of the 1987 Nobel prize for physiology or medicine. Tonegawa's testimony included stinging criticism of the university *koza*, or professorial chair system. The rigid hierarchical nature of this system stifles creativity in young researchers and is why Japan has obtained relatively few Nobel prizes, Tonegawa is reported to have said.

The resolutions for radical increases in funding have political support within the coalition, as well as the backing of ministries and agencies which will benefit from larger budgets. But Japan's Ministry of Finance, whose approval must be sought for all expenditure, is said to be resisting the new plans. **Stephen Barker**

US budget deal frees money

Washington. President Bill Clinton and the US Congress have finally agreed a firm budget for the 1996 financial year — which started last October — ending seven months of chaos and uncertainty at science funding agencies, as in other government departments.

In a deal finalized late last week which finally broke the budget impasse, the administration managed to eliminate several proposed relaxations of environmental law that Congress had sought to attach to the budget.

The two sides also reached a compromise on some of Clinton's favourite programmes. These included the Advanced Technology Program (ATP), which Congress Republicans have wanted to shut down. It will now receive \$221 million, compared with the \$491 million Clinton originally requested.

One surprise provision in the budget deal will prevent redundancies at the headquarters of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration announced only two weeks ago (see *Nature* 380, 657; 1996).

Another gives US corporations permission to export drugs and medical equipment that have been approved in specified developed countries — including Japan, Israel, South Africa and the European Union — but not in the United States.

In terms of overall funding for non-military science and technology, the agreement will leave 1996 spending at about \$32.6 billion, 3 per cent less than the 1995 total of \$34.2 billion. This compares with a cut of 9 per cent in Congress's total non-military budget — so science programmes have fared relatively well. When inflation is taken into account, science and technology spending has been cut by 6 per cent and all spending by 12 per cent.

The budget deal was particularly welcome at the National Science Foundation (NSF), one of several agencies that have been operating without an agreed budget for seven months. According to NSF officials, the agency is \$75 million better off than it would have been if — as was widely feared — no deal had been reached and it had remained dependent on temporary spending measures until the end of the financial year in September.

"I am immensely relieved and pleased that Congress has agreed upon a final budget," says Neal Lane, director of NSF. "We can now put behind us the distractions and confusion of the shutdowns and continuing resolutions," he adds, although he warns that the coming year "may prove to be even more difficult" (see below, left).

The \$221-million budget agreed for the

Republicans outline 1997 priorities

Washington. On the same day that Congress and the White House finally agreed budget terms for 1996, Republicans in the House of Representatives spelled out their science spending agenda for the 1997 financial year, which starts on 1 October.

The Republican plan includes sharp cuts to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)'s Mission to Planet Earth, corresponding increases for other space science and significant reductions in climate change and energy supply research.

The new plan was endorsed on 24 April by the House Science Committee, chaired by Robert Walker (Republican, Pennsylvania), which has jurisdiction over most science programmes except for military and biomedical research.

The Omnibus Civilian Science Act proposed by the committee would cut spending on programmes under its jurisdiction from \$20.3 billion to \$19.7 billion. This contrasts sharply with proposals by the Clinton administration to increase such spending to \$20.9 billion.

The act contains the same priorities as the committee put forward last year, although this time proposed cuts of \$270 million in Mission to Planet Earth would be ploughed back into other space science programmes (see box, above right).

The act again tries to eliminate the Advanced Technology Program in the Department of Commerce. But it does allow for a small increase in other programmes at the National Institute of Standards and Technology.

The committee proposes that the National Science Foundation (NSF) be given an increase of 1 per cent for research grants, but that it should be asked to cut administration costs. The NSF would also be told to close one of its seven directorates and — following an amendment by Joe Barton (Republican, Texas) — to change its name to the National Science and Engineering Foundation.

George Brown (Democrat, California), the senior Democrat on the committee, branded the proposals "mean and extreme" and sought, without success, to substitute President Clinton's numbers in their place.

The act is unlikely to pass into law. But if last year's pattern is repeated, its numbers will be accepted by House appropriations committees, who will then have to compromise with the Senate and, finally, the administration. There is already speculation that this will be impossible before November's elections, and that the 1997 budget will have to wait for a new Congress and administration in the new year. **C. M.**