

Planetary research: Concern amid growth

As proposed by the Reagan administration, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's budget for FY 1985 would grow by about 4 percent, to \$7.29 billion, "and the content of this program," says agency head James M. Beggs, "is up far more than that." In it are the beginnings of a permanently manned U.S. space station, of a new, unmanned Mars orbiter and more; and the President has projected that the budget will continue to grow by 1 percent a year — above and beyond inflation — through the end of the decade. Yet some researchers, both inside and outside NASA, are showing reactions that range from concern to anger.

"The aspect of the budget which is not so encouraging is the level of support for Research and Analysis [R&A] programs," according to William L. Quaide, chief scientist of the agency's Solar System Exploration Division. These are funds used to study the data already provided by planetary spacecraft, as well as to develop instruments for missions to come. Instead of rising by several million dollars from the \$59.5 million in NASA's FY '84 budget plan, the amount would be cut by \$5 million. At present, the agency has no program to fund the study of data about Venus, Jupiter or Saturn, and the proposed cut, says Quaide, would trim the Mars Data Analysis Program to where it could cover nothing but a recently begun study of the planet's volatiles and climate history. Furthermore, despite the presence in the budget of the new Mars mission and a Venus Radar Mapper that was initiated only last year, R&A funds to develop new instruments for such spacecraft would be cut by 10 percent; funds to help with another instrument definition effort would be trimmed by fully a third.

The less-than-\$60 million for R&A is not a large sum in the NASA budget. There is \$150 million proposed for the first year of "mission definition" studies of the space station, and the administration projects \$250 million in FY '86 followed, as construction begins, by \$1.2 billion in FY '87 and \$2.6 billion in FY '88. "It smells like the agency's approach to the shuttle all over again, squeezing out other programs from too small a budget," says Clark Chapman of the Planetary Science Institute in Tucson, past chairman of the American Astronomical Society's (AAS) Division for Planetary Sciences.

But the scientists have another concern. The newly proposed Mars mission, called a Mars Geoscience/Climatology Orbiter (MGCO), has been cited as the first priority in a list of missions proposed by the NASA-chartered Solar System Exploration Committee. But it is intended as part of a series designed to save money by using variations on a single spacecraft design called a "Planetary Observer" (another design, called Mariner Mk II, has been en-

visioned for another batch of missions). The SSEC had sought to have "Planetary Observers" listed in the budget as an ongoing "line item" — a key to the group's hopes of obtaining relatively regular funding for planetary research — rather than treated as isolated, individual missions. "The acceptance of MGCO by itself and the failure to approve a [Planetary Observer] line item," says Chapman, "is a bad development. It seems to me that NASA has not accepted the SSEC plan." Instead, he says, it is just "the same old way," a continued case of "putting science at the bottom of

Biomedicine

New fees for FDA; mild boost for NIH

Drug company payment for governmental evaluation of new products raised corporate hackles last week when it was included in the President's proposed budget for fiscal year 1985.

If endorsed by Congress, the provision would, for the first time, permit the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to assess user fees when companies file for approval of most new drugs. Details on exactly how to structure such a fee — designed to add \$4.5 million to the agency's operating budget — have yet to be worked out, according to an FDA spokesman.

"Charging applicants a fee for approval of new medicines raises a host of questions, many of which have been posed by the FDA itself," a spokesman for the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association told SCIENCE NEWS. "Concerns range from the difficulty of spreading fees in an equitable manner among applicants, to the question of who should pay for a government process designed to protect consumers and promote the public health, not to reward any particular company or industry."

Funding for U.S. biomedical research crept ahead several notches in the proposed budget for the National Institutes of Health. The 2.2 percent overall increase over last year's allotment brings total proposed NIH funding to more than \$4.5 billion. Emphasis on cancer research continues, with a \$23 million increase over last year's level to a total of \$1.1 billion. Heart and vascular disease research claims the next largest chunk — \$718 million — of the proposed NIH budget.

In a press briefing highlighting proposed budget changes, Margaret M. Heckler, secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, cited a new \$2 million immunization campaign by the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, Ga., designed to eliminate German measles, a primary cause of deafness in newborns.

—D. Franklin

the totem pole." The failure of the space agency to come through with Planetary Observers when arranging its priorities within the administration's budget plan, combined with the cut in R&A funds, says Chapman, "does not sound to me like NASA is making a commitment to planetary exploration."

The AAS Division for Planetary Sciences is now urging Congress to add another \$13 million to the R&A funds, and other groups are planning similar efforts. That and the lack of Observers are relatively small items on the scale of the proposed NASA budget, but, says Chapman, "I feel very bitter about it, and also very worried — on a large scale."

—J. Eberhart

Behavior

Basic research gains; losses elsewhere

The good news for social and behavioral science research in the President's proposed 1985 budget is that more money is requested for basic research. The bad news is that applied research stands to lose support.

The Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Mental Health Administration (ADAMHA), a bastion of basic social and behavioral research, is slated for a slight increase. The administration wants a 12 percent hike for drug abuse research, an 11 percent raise for alcohol-related research and a 3 percent increase for mental health research. ADAMHA would lose money, however, for clinical training for mental health workers. St. Elizabeths Hospital, a mental institution in Washington, D.C., would have to release a significant number of staff and patients under the budget, according to hospital officials.

Social and behavioral science research budgets register gains from the National Science Foundation (NSF). The proposed 23 percent increase is mainly for data bank maintenance and neuroscience projects. NSF devotes only 5 percent of its newly proposed research budget to social and behavioral work. Single-digit gains are set for the National Institute for Education and economics research at the Department of Agriculture.

Applied research does not fare as well. Social policy research within the Department of Health and Human Services loses 80 percent of its budget. Funds may also dry up for an ongoing national survey of job patterns begun by the Department of Labor in the 1960s that initially included 20,000 adults and was expanded in 1979 to include 12,000 teenagers. Other social science efforts are part of larger programs, such as child health investigations within the National Institutes of Health and delinquency research within the Department of Justice. The agencies involved will decide how much these projects get after a final budget is approved.

—B. Bower