

# Bush's first budget: Still very Reaganesque

Science figured prominently in President George Bush's budget address before a joint session of Congress last week. However, except for a few new or strengthened environmental initiatives, most of the research and development (R&D) programs he described came — without change — from his predecessor's fiscal year 1990 budget plan, issued 4½ weeks earlier (SN: 1/14/89, p.22).

For example, Bush left untouched Reagan's spending blueprints for NASA, the National Science Foundation and the Department of Energy general-science programs — slated for increases of 20.8 percent, 13 percent and 17.3 percent respectively. Similarly, Reagan's proposed 5 percent R&D cut for the National Institute of Standards and Technology still stands, even though the recently passed Omnibus Trade and Competitiveness Act (SN: 8/13/88, p.101) assigns this agency many additional functions to spur U.S. technological competitiveness — a stated priority of the new President.

The big unknown is which R&D programs Bush will propose cutting. And cut he must if he expects to justify the increased spending he proposed for a variety of programs in fiscal 1990 — beginning Oct. 1. The Gramm-Rudman-Hollings budget-deficit-reduction law requires that budgeters shave at least 40 percent, or \$64 billion, in fiscal 1990 from the current level of deficit spending.

**Confusion reigns:** Because Bush's current budget outline is at best sketchy, officials seeking to anticipate how specific programs might fare have little to go on. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) says a full line-item budget proposal carrying Bush's imprimatur will not be completed for months. Essentially, OMB explains, initiatives and priorities outlined by Bush in his Feb. 9 speech and in an accompanying 193-page document, "Building a Better America," just open Reagan's line-item spending package to negotiation.

Internal confusion is evident in those agencies targeted — explicitly or inferentially — for some of the few changes Bush would initiate.

Take the Department of Defense. Even though Reagan would have limited its overall spending to just 2 percent more than in the current fiscal year, he had slated its R&D spending to increase 6.8 percent. Bush's announcement that he would freeze defense spending in fiscal 1990 at the current level now suggests that the agency's R&D programs — accounting for 65 percent of all federal R&D spending — may also be targeted for cuts of as much as \$2.65 billion. Though Defense Department officials say they agree, they decline to comment further, saying it might be 90 days before budgets

for their individual programs will be available.

The new administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency wasn't briefed on Bush's plans for his agency until late Thursday, a few hours before the President described them to Congress. The next day, the agency's budget officials met with OMB to try to figure out which programs would change, as program chiefs within the agency read and reread "Building a Better America" to evaluate whether the initiatives it listed would require policy changes.

**New with Bush:** In his budget message, Bush proposed several new initiatives that would alter spending or revenue-generating programs. Chief among them is a series aimed at increasing environmental protection.

He promised, for example, to reinstate a five-year time frame for a key acid rain program (SN: 3/1/86, p.132). Citing budgetary constraints, Reagan last month proposed stringing out through 1997 the Energy Department's costly clean-coal program. Begun last year, it had been scheduled to spend its \$2.5 billion to develop technologies to burn coal more cleanly by 1992. Bush's decision would more than double Reagan's proposed clean-coal budget of \$325 million for next year.

tion of the Energy Department's aging and deteriorating nuclear-weapons facilities, Bush would spend an additional \$1.1 billion over this year's levels — 14 percent more than Reagan proposed. The \$200 million Bush earmarked for preserving and expanding the nation's parks and wilderness areas represents an even bigger policy change from the previous administration. Under James Watt's stewardship of federal lands, there was "zero acquisition" of recreational lands, notes Michael Mantell of the Washington, D.C.-based Conservation Foundation. Even since Watt, he says, Reagan has never spent more than \$15 million a year on acquiring land to protect natural and cultural resources.

Another \$64 million would be divided among four agencies to enhance water-quality protection. However, notes David Baker of the newly merged Friends of the Earth/Environmental Policy Institute, based in Washington, D.C., "this budget does not provide any money for the [groundwater] protection program called for in the Safe Drinking Water Act, nor does it specify any money for nonpoint-source pollution cleanup under the Clean Water Act." (Nonpoint pollution comes from diffuse, largely unidentifiable sources, such as rainwater runoff of farm chemicals.)

Winning more environmental support is Bush's decision to delay the sale of

offshore oil leases for three sensitive areas in California and Florida — and to forgo collection of a projected \$1 billion in revenues they had been expected to bring in — pending an environmental impact analysis of drilling in these areas by a new task force involving the Interior Department, Energy Department and National Academy of Sciences.

Yet some members of Congress, such as Andy Ireland (R-Fla.), worry that this controversial move doesn't go far enough. One site where lease sales will be delayed runs from just southwest of the Everglades to within 3 miles of Key West, prized for its beaches and clean waters. In October, a congressional ban on drilling in this area will run out. At that time, at least some owners of the 72 legally obtained leases for oil exploration in this region want to begin drilling. Ireland says he hopes Bush will rectify this loophole in protection for the designated area by placing a drilling ban on current leaseholders.

Bush also announced he would allow the sale of leases for drilling rights within Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. If threatened beaches in California and Florida warrant a temporary ban on offshore drilling, maintains Tim Mahoney of the Sierra Club in Washington, D.C., "then surely drilling in the even more pristine Alaska wilderness — a world-class, unique resource" — should not be condoned, let alone fostered. The one consolation environmentalists have on this issue, Mahoney says, is that "Congress will not allow the Bush administration to lease the Arctic in 1990."

## Additional policy changes:

- Besides supporting reauthorization of the Clean Air Act, Bush said he would soon submit legislation to Congress calling for strict limits on sulfur dioxide and nitrous oxide emissions — key acid-rain precursors.

- Bush proposed modifying the current "research and experimentation" (R&E) tax credit — due to expire at the end of 1989 — and making it a permanent addition to the tax code. He would also reinstate and liberalize a tax rule, which expired last year, for determining and limiting how much R&E investment could be claimed for tax deductions.

- Bush proposed elevating the director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) from presidential "science adviser" to an "assistant to the President." This title change for the as-yet-unnamed presidential adviser is subtle, acknowledges OSTP spokeswoman Mary Catherine English. Reagan's science advisers reported directly to him and attended meetings of the economic and domestic policy councils. Now, she says, OSTP's director will become an actual member of those councils and precede the President's Joint Chiefs of Staff in White House protocol.

— J. Raloff