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DEADLINE & DELAY: THE BUDGET NEGOTIATIONS STUMBLE ON

Congress is no respecter of deadlines--its own, or Update's. As this is written (November 19), White House and Congressional representatives are in their fourth week of roller-coaster negotiating on a budget reduction package to avoid the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings (GRH) sequestration, which is due to occur on November 20. The final deal has still not been struck. Discussion with congressional and agency aides suggests, however, that some parameters of a deal have emerged. There is also informed speculation that the GRH sequestration deadline will be extended.

If there is a pre-GRH agreement, the deal will involve revenue enhancers, savings in defense and domestic discretionary programs, and savings in certain entitlement programs. The package is expected to cover two years: it will reduce the deficit from \$23-\$30 billion the first year, somewhat more the second year. The number for reducing domestic discretionary programs, which includes most research programs, is \$2.6 billion. The calculation is that 3.5% will be lopped off FY 1988 appropriated levels--after adjustments are made by the leadership to outlay allocation levels, which will have the effect of reducing the amount appropriations subcommittees will have to fund their agencies. (Most appropriations bills are stuck at the

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The Consortium represents more than 185,000 American scientists across the full range of the social and behavioral sciences, functioning as a bridge between the research world and the Washington community.

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House-Senate conference committee stage waiting for the weather to clear.) What is unclear is whether the ultimate reductions will be across-the-board for all programs, or left up to the discretion of the appropriations committees and subcommittees. For NSF and other research agencies, a freeze at FY 1987 levels (perhaps with an inflation increase) is estimated, under the parameters described above. This, however, could change. Under any formula reduction--even GRH--Congress can adjust pre-formula funding benchmarks or add provisos.

In the meantime, if an agreement is reached or if one appears more and more likely, the GRH deadline will be extended, since Congress will need time to pass the legislation to implement its deal. All parties have now agreed that sequestration should be avoided, unless negotiations appear hopeless. Extension to December 16 (the same day the second Continuing Resolution expires) or even later may occur. If agreement is forged today, that is one piece of legislation Congress will expedite.

NSF CENTERS PROGRAM PROCEEDS DESPITE BUDGET UNCERTAINTIES

The new Science and Technology Centers (STC) program of the National Science Foundation (NSF) continues to prepare for a tough competition despite uncertainties over the NSF budget for FY 1988 and some concern about the impact of the Centers program on the future of NSF (see Update, July 3, 1987). On November 9-10 the 17-member Advisory Committee met to discuss the mechanisms for reviewing proposals. In addition, Alan Leshner, Director of the NSF Office of Science and Technology Centers Development, has told COSSA that he encourages social and behavioral scientists interested in developing proposals to contact his office at 202/357-9808 to discuss possible projects.

The STC program was announced as one of the three major elements of the FY 1988 NSF budget. NSF proposed to spend \$30 million in FY 1988 establishing some 10-20 centers to "exploit opportunities in science and technology where the complexity of the research problems or the resources needed to solve these problems require the advantages of scale, duration, and/or equipment and facilities that can only be provided by a campus-based research center." STCs must be based in academic institutions (although they may involve linkages among various types of institutions) and must include a tangible commitment to the Center by the home institution. They should provide education and research opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, industrial fellows, and faculty members from other colleges and universities. Mechanisms for knowledge transfer and linkages with other sectors of society--notably the private sector, national laboratories, other federal agencies, and state and local governments--will be strongly encouraged. Each Center will receive NSF support for up to 11 years, provided a high level of achievement is maintained.

There are no predetermined topics or scientific areas for the Centers. Proposals from all areas funded by the Foundation are acceptable. In addition to the awards for FY 1988, approximately 30 planning grants of up to \$35,000 each will be available for FY 1989. The deadline for receipt of FY 1988 Center proposals is January 15, 1988. The deadline for receipt of FY 1989 Planning Grant proposals is February 1, 1988.

The Advisory Committee (Gardner Lindzey, Director of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, is the only social or behavioral scientist member) spent most of its two-day meeting discussing how to review the anticipated 300-500 proposals. The review process will be multi-tiered. Once proposals are received they will be classified by content into various multi-disciplinary areas. The proposals will then be sent out for mail review. Each Directorate has designated a person to be the STC-Technical Coordinator. He or she will have the important role of evaluating the mail reviews. (John C. Wooley has been so designated by the Biological, Behavioral and Social Science Directorate.) This process will be expected to winnow out 80-90% of the proposals. Site visits will be conducted for the expected 30-40 proposals remaining. The Advisory Committee will then select the 10-20 finalists, probably in July. These recommended proposals will be forwarded to the August meeting of the National Science Board for final approval.

Although budget decisions of the Congress may impinge on these plans, NSF Director Erich Bloch made it clear that the STC program will get under way in FY 1988. Reiterating a sentiment he has expressed before, Bloch told the Advisory Committee that to undertake "new initiatives only when there is new money" is a "prescription for disaster." Leshner, who is excited by the quality of the ideas he has heard so far, believes the competition will be stiff--and relishes the prospect.

PEACE INSTITUTE REAUTHORIZATION URGED, CHARTER SCRUTINIZED

On November 10, the Senate committees on Foreign Relations and on Labor and Human Resources held an oversight hearing on the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) chaired by Sen. Spark Matsunaga (D-HI), one of the chief legislative supporters of the establishment of the Institute. While witnesses were unanimous in calling for congressional reauthorization of the Institute, some also recommended changes in its charter.

Of greater immediate concern at the hearing was the proposed funding levels for the Institute. USIP had requested \$10 million for FY 1988 while the Office of Management and Budget had asked for \$3.3 million. The House, in a last-minute action, voted to zero-fund USIP, while the Senate Appropriations Committee recommended that USIP receive \$5 million (see Update, October 9, 1987). A final decision on FY 1988 funding will be made by a House-Senate conference committee. John Norton Moore, chairman of the USIP board, testified that the Institute's "very highest short-term priority is obtaining adequate funding from Congress."

One way out of this quandary was offered at the hearing when the topic of private funding for USIP was aired as a possible means of obtaining outside support for Institute activities. Witnesses J. David Eberly (program coordinator for the World Peace Academy) and Keith Geiger (Vice President of the National Education Association) testified that Congress should consider amending the Institute's charter to allow it to solicit and accept non-governmental funds, though Geiger said special guidelines should be set to ensure that the Institute maintain its credibility. Both stressed that opening USIP to outside funds should not weaken Congress' resolve to fund the Institute's basic operations and programs. This issue was also raised at an October 28 meeting of the National Peace Institute Foundation, a voluntary nongovernmental oversight group. Robert Conlan, executive director of the foundation, noted then that, fraught with dangers as opening USIP up to nongovernmental funding might be, this topic deserves serious review.

The Senate committees heard testimony regarding other aspects of USIP's charter. All witnesses recommended reauthorization of USIP and some, including Geiger, wanted that reauthorization to be permanent. "As the situation stands," Geiger testified, "much time and energy of the Institute staff and its officers will be wasted in activity related to each new two-year authorization." Robert Conlan, speaking on the need for permanent reauthorization at the October 28 foundation meeting, asserted, "We would like to see [the Institute] permanently authorized."

The section of the charter granting Institute personnel access to classified information was also examined at the hearing. It was criticized by Eberly, who testified that access to classified material defeats the notion of an open, educational organization, while Geiger said that, since the Institute is not a policy-making body, it has no compelling need for unlimited access to such information. At the foundation meeting, Conlan noted that empowering the Institute to examine classified material might be neither necessary nor appropriate.

WHILE YOU'RE UP, GET ME ANOTHER GRANT

Who pays the costs of preparing proposals for federally funded research conducted by university scientists? The lore is that university funds support the gearing-up process: research planning and proposal preparation--from receiving the application form to submitting the proposal. When and if a grant is awarded, an indirect cost allowance paid to the sponsoring university goes some of the way towards reimbursing the institution for such internal costs; for unsuccessful applications, the preparation and proposal costs are absorbed by the institution. However, even for successful applications only some of the costs are ever recouped, since by federal rules (for example, OMB Circular A-21) there are limitations on reimbursement for preparation costs. In addition, indirect cost allowances must cover many other university-borne overheads.

A recent study prepared by the Public Health Service (PHS) shows that the reality is substantially different. The study, now being pondered within PHS granting agencies, analyzed the preparation costs for traditional research project awards (R01s), which constitute the largest number of PHS grants and the most heavily funded category, at three universities: two private universities (one receiving many PHS awards, one not) and a large state university. A study team went on-site, interviewed and got data from those involved, and obtained multiple estimates of time, effort, and cost. The numbers arrived at in the study are not necessarily representative of all grant-getting institutions, but are at least 'hard' numbers for all FY 1986 grants at three types of institutions. Preparation costs were carefully segregated between actual research team--principal investigator(s), research assistants, and support staff--and central administration costs (for example, in the office of sponsored research or equivalent), and reported only the former. (Some of the latter costs, of course, are supposed to be covered by the indirect cost allowance.)

The main finding is that some 60% of identifiable preparation costs were charged as direct costs to grants. How many of the preparation costs were actually paid on the specific grant for which they were incurred depends on how many and which of the applications were successful. Though the success rate for PHS grants is very low, it is known that previously successful applicants are more likely to be funded for new proposals.

Of particular interest is the category of competing continuation costs. The principle is that funding for years 2...n of most funded grants must compete for renewed funding with new proposals. The PHS study found that about the same effort went into continuation as into initial proposals, and similar costs were charged. Since the overall continuation award rate is much higher than the initial award rate, preparation costs for continuations are especially likely to be covered by ongoing grant funds. There is also some indication that grants of a more elaborate type than R01s--program-project or center grants, for example--are even more heavily loaded with preparation costs.

A realistic outlook characterizes the study, which does not indulge in university-bashing, and does not condemn the situation. It holds that noncompeting continuation costs, for example, should be paid for on grant, since they are in essence required progress reports. It points out that the federal-university research system assumes that young investigators prepare, at least partially, for their first independent research while on the payroll of a mentor's grant. That is the whole point of research assistantships and postdoctoral fellowships. The study implies that it would be utterly unrealistic to expect experienced grantees not to be planning their next research while finishing their current projects. Since the PHS is required to fund only extremely well-prepared applications, application costs could be considered a fixed parameter of the federal research-funding system. Research institutions that do not have established overhead agreements, or are not part of the cycling

system that assumes research planning for the next grant to occur during the conduct of current one, would be at a serious disadvantage if they could not charge considerable preparation costs to the grants they do receive.

Nevertheless, the central question is: should preparation costs be part of the direct cost budget, or should another system be devised? The study is quite clear that "current practice provides existing recipients with a tremendous advantage." The only implied challenge to universities comes from the observation that institutions seem to have no internal guidelines or oversight on these matters, and leaves them to the judgment of researchers.

The study document obtained informally by COSSA suggests that data be gathered systematically from grantees in the next-to-last project period (for example, year two of a three-year grant) that would identify how much time and effort has gone into proposals to follow. More creatively, it makes an argument for longer grant periods: for shifting to four or five years, rather than the modal three. This would prune much expense from the entire system, in addition to permitting better research planning. Additionally, a shift toward noncompeting continuation as the normal mechanism would reduce costs and result in more scientific yield, provided the most promising applications were identified at the outset. (Such an alternative would be likely, COSSA believes, to gain the approval of the Office of Management and Budget but might be looked at skeptically by Congress, since it would imply a higher level of multi-year obligations.)

The PHS currently has at least one major experiment going, involving a number of research institutions in Florida that receive PHS funds. The main motivation for the Florida study is that of cost-containment in relation to scientific yield. Beyond this, a number of science analysts (e.g., Lederman in Science, 4 September 1987) have pointed out that many or most developed countries fund a larger share of the cost of research conducted in academic institutions externally--i.e., with funds from outside the academic institution. In the U.S., universities differ in their views on how much, and which, costs of research they believe a federal granting agency should cover--and how the mechanisms should work. The present PHS study, by identifying true costs and how they are covered, may, like the Florida study, prove beneficial to the long-range federal/research university relationship.

NEW SCHOOL BECOMES LATEST COSSA CONTRIBUTOR

As reported in the last Update (November 6, 1987), Boston University and Duke University recently became COSSA contributors. Now we are happy to report that the Graduate Faculty, New School for Social Research, has also announced that it will be a contributing university beginning in 1988, bringing to 53 the number of contributors.

SOURCES OF RESEARCH SUPPORT: DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

COSSA provides this information as a service, and encourages readers to contact the agency rather than COSSA for further information or application materials. A comprehensive listing of federal funding sources is contained in COSSA's Guide to Federal Funding for Social Scientists.

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

The Human Learning and Behavior Branch, Center for Research for Mothers and Children, of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development is inviting grant applications for research on behavioral aspects of AIDS prevention in children and adolescents. Research is needed in selected topics addressing behavioral approaches to preventing AIDS transmission in children and adolescents, focusing on reducing the likelihood of behaviors associated with the spread of the HIV infection.

This Request for Applications (RFA) is designed to generate research on how to educate children and to intervene in adolescent populations to stop the spread AIDS. Four topics have been targeted in this RFA: developmentally appropriate educational approaches to teaching AIDS-related information; intervention methods for teaching high-risk groups how to make decisions, resist peer pressure, and analyze the relationship between current behavior and future consequences; reliable and valid methods for measuring behavioral change resulting from intervention to prevent AIDS; and the consequences of HIV exposure upon the social and emotional development of children and/or adolescents.

Review Process: Standard review procedure.

Budget: Up to 10 awards are anticipated, contingent upon the availability of funding.

Funding Mechanism: Research project grant (R01).

Deadline: February 12, 1988

Contact: Dr. Norman A. Krasnegor (Chief) or
Dr. Sarah L. Freidman (Health Scientist Administrator)
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