

Research Agency Budgets Off to a Good Start

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The Fiscal Year 2003 budget of the federal government is the subject of much debate on Capitol Hill and in the media. Despite the much publicized partisan squabbling that is characterizing deliberations on some issues, both the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Science Foundation (NSF) are enjoying bipartisan support and are solidly out of the blocks in the race for funding increases.

As the *Observer* goes to press, only the Senate has approved FY 03 appropriations for these agencies. The House will take up these spending measures in the latter days of September at the very earliest.

The Senate has approved an NIH budget of \$27.2 billion, which will complete the doubling of the NIH budget that began five years ago. This is an increase of \$3.7 billion over FY 02, although close to half — \$1.46 billion — of this amount is appropriated to the National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases for bio-terrorism and vaccine research.

NSF was given a \$5.3 billion budget by the Senate, an 11.8 percent increase over FY 02. This is \$300 million more than the Foundation submitted as their budget request to Congress. The good news here is the support for the Social, Behavioral, and Economic (SBE) sciences directorate, which is slated to receive a 1.9 percent increase. Planned with the increase is the initiation of a Priority Area in SBE, aimed at supporting basic research that is primed for major advances due to new research tools and data. A theme of this research would be how technology and society advance through constant interaction. Also included is an 11.6 percent increase in the budget for behavioral and cognitive sciences.

In addition, legislation has been introduced in both the House and Senate, which could approve the Reauthorization of funds for NSF and double that agency's budget over a five-year period. The bills have received bi-partisan support, and both have passed their respective chambers, but the final version and a guarantee of the President's signature are from clear.

Watch for updates in the *Observer*.