

Congress Preserves Energy Department for FY96, Boosting Materials Work

Since early 1996, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has been on and off the Congressional chopping block. This federal agency oversees a broad array of programs and projects related to energy and the environment and supports some \$300 million in materials research. Several U.S. Congressional Representatives had wanted to disband the DOE and merge some of its activities with other agencies under a single entity. Such talk had DOE promising to make large cuts; yet, while some of those cuts are going to have to be made, the department itself and materials research in particular seems to have come out of the 1996 budgetary scuffles intact.

Already, in May, DOE had taken pre-emptive steps and announced plans to reduce its work force by 27 percent, or 3,788 people, in the next five years. But at the time, DOE Secretary Hazel R. O'Leary promised to preserve essential science and technology programs.

Despite O'Leary's work, the House Subcommittee on Energy and Environment, in June, came up with a different budget scenario in its authorization legislation, one that cut \$1.7 billion from President Clinton's request for 1996 and reduced DOE's budget to below the 1995 level. This authorization bill sets limits for an appropriations bill, which actually establishes how much money an agency receives in a given year. The House committee pulled the DOE appropriations bill together a week later and only reduced the budget by \$940 million, not \$1.361 billion, below 1995 levels.

The authorization committee had targeted "trendy science," in particular global warming research, for severe curtailment. The bill increased funding for basic energy sciences and decreased funding for general science and research activities and for biological and environmental research. Efforts to increase support for studies in solar energy or renewable fuels, for example, were defeated.

The U.S. Senate and its relevant committees then took just two weeks to pass the Energy and Water Development Appropriations Bill. The Senate Appropria-

tions Committee had wanted to further reduce funding for several DOE science programs below the House's recommendation. But in the end, the Senate agreed with the House appropriation for basic energy sciences. Clinton had asked for \$811.4 million, up from \$747.3 million for FY1995. Congress plans to provide \$791.7 million instead of \$811.4, and out of that, about \$372 million for materials research, up from \$280 million for fiscal year 1995. "On the whole, we did very well," said Iran Thomas, acting director of basic energy sciences for DOE.

But Thomas is also quick to point out that Congress took the \$19 million from the President's proposed budget out of the budgets for materials and chemical sciences research. Some shrinkage in support of other areas within DOE will be distributed throughout the agency. Furthermore, in the past, the budgets were divided with capital equipment and major projects supported separately from operating expenses. Now everything is rolled into one dollar amount, and no one is sure what will happen as a result, Thomas said.

Also, new initiatives and earmarked programs could nibble away any gains that materials research has made. For example, the basic energy sciences budget specifies that \$8 million be spent for design work on a spallation neutron source, which will likely be done at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory. About \$7 million will go toward supporting programs in states that typically get very few federal research dollars.

"You might say that we're not that bad off, but because of these uncertainties, we are still not sure how [the funding] will be allocated," said Thomas.

ELIZABETH PENNISI

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DOE Publishes Materials Sciences Programs: Fiscal Year 1994

Materials Sciences Programs: Fiscal Year 1994 is the most recent annual program summary book for the materials sciences research program that is funded by the Department of Energy. This publication includes program descriptions for 458 research programs, including 216 programs at 14 national laboratories, 242 research grants (233 of which are at universities), and nine Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) grants. Five cross-cutting indices identify all 458 programs according to principal investigator(s), materials, techniques, phenomena, and environment. Other contents include identification of the Division of Materials Sciences Staff structure and expertise; a bibliographical listing of 45 scientific workshop, topical, descriptive, Research Assistance Task Force, and research facilities reports on select topics that identify materials science research needs and opportunities; a summary of the DOE Center of Excellence for the Synthesis and Processing of Advanced Materials; a summary and access information on 14 national researcher user facilities including synchrotron light sources, neutron beam sources, electron beam microcharacterization instruments, materials preparation and combustion research; and an analytical summary of research funding levels.

To obtain a copy, call 301-903-3427 or e-mail to Christie.Ashton@mailgw.er.doe.gov and request DOE publication DOE/ER-0648. The publication can also be accessed on the World Wide Web under <http://www.doe.gov/>. □

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