

Coalition Presses Congress for Increases for Research

On March 4 the presidents of 23 science, engineering, and mathematics organizations released a joint statement warning of the dangers of the decline in federal investment in research. The coalition, which included some large umbrella organizations, comprised a total of 108 professional societies, including the AMS, the Association for Women in Mathematics, the Mathematical Association of America, and the Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics (SIAM).

This was the first time such a large and diverse group of organizations banded together on the issue of funding for science. It was also the first time that the AMS has been so deeply and publicly involved with such matters: AMS president Arthur Jaffe moderated the press conference at which the statement was released and was a key figure in drafting it and getting organizations to sign on.¹

Also making statements at the press conference were the presidents of four other organizations: Paul Anderson, American Chemical Society; D. Allan Bromley, American Physical Society; Andrea K. Dupree, American Astronomical Society; and Charles K. Alexander, Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers.

The Clinton Administration's budget request for fiscal year 1998, made public in early February, marks the fifth consecutive year of constant-dollar decline in federal funding for scientific research and development. The budget calls for an increase of 2.8% for support of basic research. For the National Science Foundation, the requested increase is 3.0% (an article on the NSF budget request is in preparation for a future issue of the *Notices*).

The joint statement calls for an increase "in the range of 7%" for agencies charged with carrying out scientific research and education. "To con-

strain still further federal spending on scientific programs would jeopardize the future well-being of our nation," the statement says. With the drive to balance the budget foremost on the Congressional agenda, it is unclear whether such a large increase is possible. But the coalition found a bright spot in a bill recently introduced by Senator Phil Gramm, (R-Texas) which calls for doubling federal spending on basic and medical research over the next ten years.

But the harsh fiscal reality is that an increase for science means a cut somewhere else. The coalition is not going to take a stand on what should be cut, but according to SIAM president John Guckenheimer the scientific community does need to justify the proportion of the budget it is asking for. "One justification may be that revenues will increase, so that funding science is a 'win-win' situation," he says. "But that is an argument that must be substantiated." Jaffe believes the argument can be made, noting that the nation is today reaping the dividends in improved quality of life from investments in science made thirty years ago. "We must reverse the current slow decay of the scientific infrastructure," Jaffe declares. "We are trying to encourage a grassroots movement for science."

The joint statement is just the first step in a longer-range effort to influence the budget as it wends its way through Congress over the summer. The AMS will continue to work with the other organizations and with Congressional representatives and staff to advocate increases for science. The coalition that produced the statement represents more than a million scientists, engineers, and mathematicians. That sounds like an impressive number of voters, but in the past this group has carried more prestige than political weight, so it is unclear if the increase they asked for will materialize. But as James Turner, a staff member for the House Science Committee, put it, "If you don't work hard for an increase, you will get a decrease."

—Allyn Jackson

¹Another example of increasing AMS attention to Washington affairs can be seen in a Congressional briefing on mathematics, held the day after the press conference; see the accompanying article on page 585 of this issue of the *Notices*.