

Senate Committee Action on Federal Science Budget

Lewis-Burke Associates, the MAA's public relations representative in Washington, D.C., sent the following report on recent Senate committee actions related to the National Science Foundation and other federal science agency budgets for FY 2007.

On Tuesday, July 11, the Senate Commerce-Justice-Space Appropriations Subcommittee marked up their budget recommendations for FY 2007. Included in this subcommittee is funding for the National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). This subcommittee's mark up comes on the heels of House passage of this bill in late June. The Subcommittee's recommendations fully fund the President's request for the American Competitiveness Initiative (ACI) for the NSF and the National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST).

National Science Foundation

For NSF, the Subcommittee is recommending \$5.99 billion which is \$410.5 million above last year's level and \$28.3 million below the request (and the House level) of \$6.02 billion. For NSF's Research and Related Activities, the Subcommittee is recommending \$4.646 billion – \$314.9 million above last year's level and \$19.5 million below the request and the House passed level. Within this amount, the Subcommittee has provided the \$50.7 million request for National Radio Astronomy Observatory operations.

For NSF's Major Research Equipment and Facilities Construction account, the Subcommittee is recommending \$237.3 million (the same level as recommended by the House and \$3 million below the request). The Subcommittee's recommendation provides the budget request for the ongoing MREFC projects including the Atacama Large Millimeter Array (ALMA) project, Earthscope, the IceCube Neutrino Observatory, the Scientific Ocean Drilling project, and South Pole Station modernization. The Subcommittee's recommendation also provides the request for three new starts (including the Alaska Region Research Vessel, the Ocean Observatories Initiative; and the National Ecological Observatory Network).

For Education and Human Resources, the Subcommittee is providing \$835.8 million, which is \$39 million above last year's level and \$19.5 million above the request. The additional funds are to augment minority institution programs including the Louis Stokes Alliances for Minority Participation, the tech talent undergraduate program, and \$110 million for the Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research.

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

For NASA, the Subcommittee is recommending \$16.757 billion – this is \$510.6 million above the FY 2006 level. Within the NASA total, the Subcommittee is recommending \$10.5 billion for Science, Aeronautics, and Exploration – this is \$852 million more than last year and \$35 million below the budget request. For the Exploration account, the Subcommittee is providing \$6.235 billion, a level equal to the President's request. At the full committee mark up, Senator Mikulski intends to offer an amendment to add \$1 billion to the NASA budget to replenish programs decimated by the costs associated with the loss of Columbia and the costs incurred

by NASA to return to flight. Additional details will be provided as soon as the committees report is available.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

For NOAA, the Subcommittee is recommending \$4.4 billion; this is \$535.9 million over last years level, \$758.2 million more than the request and \$1.055 billion more than the amount recommended in the House bill. The Senate bill provides a “down payment” on the June report to the Congress issued by the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative.

The Subcommittees recommendations include \$60 million to jump start a national Integrated Ocean Observation System (IOOS) program and \$31 million for State-wide ocean observing systems. The Subcommittee directs NOAA to develop a competitive, peer-reviewed process for awarding regional ocean observing systems grants in FY 2008.

For NOAA research – Oceanic and Atmospheric Research – the Subcommittee is recommending \$467 million (compared to the House recommendation of \$338.9 million) which includes the following programmatic recommendations:

Competitive Research Program (climate change research) \$125.7 million

National Sea Grant Program (program base and initiatives) \$ 83.5 million

National Undersea Research Program \$ 12.5 million

Ocean Exploration \$ 25.0 million

The National Weather Service is funded at \$823.6 million; within this level \$7.3 million is for the Space Environment Center and \$7.5 million is for the U.S. Weather Research Program Thorpex. The NOAA Education programs are recommended to receive a total of \$37.8 million compared to the Houses recommendation of \$26.5 million. All in all, the Senate has dramatically improved the Houses recommendation for many NOAA programs, but a tough conference looms for later this year to determine the final figures for all of these activities.

Next Steps

This bill will be considered by the full committee in the Senate on July 13th. Senate floor action has yet to be scheduled.

Addendum, July 17, 2006 Sam Rankin, Washington Liaison for AMS, sent the following e-mail;

The Senate Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations Subcommittee marked up its appropriations bill last Tuesday. On Thursday the full Senate Appropriations Committee approved the subcommittee bill.

The NSF, which is under the jurisdiction of this committee, was given a FY 2007 budget mark of \$5.99 billion. This compares to a FY 2007 budget mark of \$6.02 billion given by the House.

The Senate has not passed on this bill, and speculation is that this bill will not be considered in the Senate as a stand alone bill. The House and Senate will eventually have to come to an agreement on the NSF budget and the agreement may be part of an omnibus spending package that is done after the election.

Given the two budget marks (House and Senate) we expect the NSF to receive at least \$5.99 billion barring any across the board cuts, as has been the case for the last two years.