

NEW WORLD

Congress's Stand the Unkindest Cut Yet

by our Washington Correspondent

ALTHOUGH there have been many loud complaints on Capitol Hill in the past few months about the Nixon Administration's parsimonious attitude towards science, Congress has succeeded in giving the budget of the National Science Foundation perhaps the worst mauling it has received for years. Not only are the Senate and the House of Representatives both about to chop \$13 million from the Administration's already meagre budget request for the foundation (see box), but they have also managed to arrange matters so that basic research will be particularly hard hit. One NSF official estimated last week, for example, that more than \$30 million may have to be cut from the amount that the foundation was hoping to spend this year on research support.

The foundation's troubles can be put down partly to the tortuous nature of the Congressional appropriations process, but the chief problem is that the NSF has got caught in the middle of the bitter struggle between Congress and the Administration over which branch of the government should control the pursestrings. What happened, in short, is that while Congress has cut the NSF's total budget request, it has also decreed that some of the foundation's activities should get more money than the Administration wants to spend; in the process, basic research has been shortchanged. Moreover, if the Office of Management and Budget impounds any of the NSF's money—as it has in the past four years—the foundation will be in dire financial straits.

The National Science Foundation is one of the few government agencies for which Congress passes two separate budget bills—an authorisations bill and an appropriations bill. The former simply sets upper limits on the amount of money that can be spent on individual NSF programmes, while the latter stipulates exactly how much money should be made available to the foundation. The idea is that the authorisations bill sets priorities for the foundation's programmes, establishes guidelines for the committees which handle the appropriations bill, and provides an extra measure of Congressional control over the foundation's activities. But this year, instead of simply setting upper spending limits, the authorisations bill also establishes minimum spending levels for a few selected pro-

grammes, and it is those which are causing much of the trouble.

The reason for putting the minimum spending levels into the authorisations bill is to try to prevent the Administration from ignoring the priorities that Congress wants to establish for the foundation. In the past few years, Congress has been concerned about the level of funding for the NSF's education and graduate student support programmes, and it has consistently increased the budgets for those activities. But the Administration has simply refused to spend the extra money.

Specifically, the authorisations bill sets minimum spending levels for the foundation's science education, institutional improvement, graduate student support, and oceanographic vessel construction programmes. Together, those spending levels add up to some \$18.3 million more than the Administration wants to spend. It would have been fine if the appropriations committees had increased the Administration's total budget request for the foundation by at

least that amount, but they didn't. Instead, they decreased it by \$13 million.

The upshot is that if the Administration obeys its Congressional mandate, the budgets for those programmes unprotected by the minimum spending levels must be cut by a total of \$31.3 million—the \$13 million overall reduction in the foundation's budget, plus \$18.3 million which will have to be transferred to comply with the minimum spending requirements. The bulk of the unprotected programmes happen to be scientific research project support, national and special research programmes and support for national research centres—the foundation's basic research programmes.

But the problems do not end there, for the foundation's programme of Research Applied to National Needs (RANN) has been caught in exactly the same predicament. The authorisations bill stipulates that "no less than" \$25 million must be spent on RANN projects in energy research, and \$8 million on earthquake research. The Adminis-

BUDGETS

Hit by a Limousine

by our Washington Correspondent

CONGRESS has finally agreed on the size of the budgets for the National Science Foundation and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration for the 1974 fiscal year. Both agencies are set to receive less money than the Administration had requested. But final passage of the appropriations bill which contains their budgets is being held up by a strange dispute over the use of chauffeur-driven limousines by government executives. Earlier this month, the bill was sent back to a House-Senate conference committee to iron out disagreements on the matter.

The same conference committee managed to agree in August on how some \$19,000 million should be spent by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, NASA, NSF and some other government agencies. But it failed to reach agreement on a provision, sponsored by Senator Proxmire and passed by the Senate, which seeks to prevent government executives in agencies covered by the bill from riding to work in government limousines.

Both the House and the Senate have now agreed to the figures contained in

the appropriations bill, and they will not be reopened to debate, but the Senate continues to insist that the limousine restrictions be included in the bill while the House is equally adamant that they be kept out. Until one side or the other backs down in the conference committee, the appropriations bill will hang in limbo. The General Accounting Office has, however, been requested to make a full study of the use of limousines throughout the government, and the Senate representatives in the committee are expected to back down until the study has been completed.

As for NASA and the National Science Foundation, the appropriations bill contains \$3,002 million for the former and \$596.6 million for the latter, which is some \$13.9 million and \$13 million respectively less than the administration had requested. In the past few years, however, the Office of Management and Budget has impounded some \$59.8 million in funds appropriated by Congress for NSF, and if that money is released this year—as the Administration's budget indicates—the foundation will have some \$628.5 million available. That would give the foundation \$13.5 million more than OMB released last year, but it still falls well short of the \$645.7 million that Congress appropriated last year.