

The federal energy budget proposal: crash program for environmentalism

by Marsha Freeman

The fiscal year 1985 budget request for the Department of Energy (DOE) released on Feb. 1 by the Reagan administration mirrors the worst Carter-era budget submission. Rather than following through on the President's stated commitment to nuclear and advanced energy development, the budget includes massive increases for conservation and "alternate" technologies while decreasing the nuclear fission and fusion budgets.

While Energy Secretary Donald Hodel remarked in his budget briefing that the political instability in the Middle East could jeopardize U.S. oil supplies, the very real threat to national security of a complete collapse of the nation's nuclear industry was ignored.

The DOE budget reflects an election-year capitulation of the administration to the solar energy zero-growthers in the Congress, a capitulation rationalized as promoting a "balanced and mixed energy resource system." This is paralleled by the fact that the largest increase in the proposed federal budget is for the Environmental Protection Agency.

For the first three years of the Reagan administration, the annual DOE budget request represented a necessary turnaround from the four years of sabotage of development of advanced-energy sources during the Carter years. The DOE budget ceased to be a subsidy for the anti-nuclear activities of the Parson Malthus Democrats, but huge increases in these anti-energy programs are now proposed.

Conservation, and both solar and renewable energy programs are slated for a 308% increase over FY84 requests. Conservation grants for low-income housing weatherization efforts are proposed to increase from \$3 million in FY84 to \$252 million, an 8,300% jump from what the administration proposed last year. Under close scrutiny, many of these programs, emphasized while James Schlesinger ran the Department of Energy in the Carter administration, have been found to be not only expensive and wasteful but also destructive to the environment.

Advanced fossil-fuel programs, such as magnetohydrodynamics (MHD), which could eliminate all pollution from burning coal to produce electric power, were eliminated from

previous Reagan budgets. This year a small amount of money will be proposed for MHD to redirect the program "to a multi-year advanced research program consisting of scientific research and an integrated system test, which could lead to an 80-megawatt combined-cycle system to be cost-shared with the private sector." The alleged success of proposing cost-sharing with the private sector contributed to congressional cancellation of the Clinch River Breeder Reactor program last year.

The Soviets are now building a 500-megawatt MHD combined-cycle power plant which will be operational before the end of this decade.

Destroying fission and fusion

The Reagan administration has made no attempt to stop the hideous destruction of nuclear power in this country. A national defense mobilization means that power-plant construction must be taken out of the hands of the Wall Street bond houses and placed under federal credit and financial policies.

When the current economic collapse is reversed, the United States will find it has a *shortage of on-line electric generating capacity in less than five years*. If we do not

U.S. Department of Energy budget

(Millions of dollars)

Program	FY84 request	FY84 actual	FY85 request	% change
Conservation	71	151	148	+ 108
Conservation grants	3	280	252	+ 8,300
Solar and renewable	102	215	191	+ 87
Fission	848	675	618	- 27
Magnetic fusion	467	471	483	+ 3

Note: The budget requests are submitted by the administration. The actual FY figures are the amounts appropriated by the Congress.

reverse the current shut-down of nuclear plant construction now, we will not be able to catch up at that point. This situation is a threat to the national security of the nation.

The DOE budget for advanced nuclear technology development in FY85 represents a reduction of 27% from the previous year's request. It is a statement by the administration that there is no future for nuclear energy.

The nuclear fusion allocations, which fund the only energy and industrial alternative to using finite resources until such are exhausted, continues to decline. The budget for inertial-confinement fusion, using lasers and other directed energy beams, is slated for a \$30 million cut. This is part of the election-year mentality which prompted the White House to "move money around" in the defense budget—which includes inertial fusion—so that the beam-weapons defense program would not "look so big." The result will be to cripple promising avenues of fusion research.

The magnetic-fusion program, mandated by Congress in 1980 to receive substantial increases to develop commercial fusion energy by the turn of the century, continues to fall behind. The DOE request adds \$12 million to the \$471 million authorized by Congress last year, which does not even keep up with inflation.

This level of funding carries out the policy of science adviser George Keyworth which states that fusion should remain a "scientific" program not able to develop commercially viable technology for another 50 years. At the present time, the inertial-confinement fusion program in Japan has outrun the U.S. program by using the largest fusion laser in the world. The Japanese magnetic-fusion program will likely surpass the United States in level of effort this year.

Space budget kept level

Although the President announced in his State of the Union address that the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) had his go-ahead for a manned space station, budget considerations and not technical readiness are determining the schedule of deployment of the station.

The FY85 NASA request contains an insignificant increase of 4% over FY84. The space-station program will be stretched out over nearly a decade so the total space budget can be kept nearly level. The peak funding for the station of approximately \$2 billion per year will be delayed until NASA can bring the money spent on the Space Shuttle down as the remaining orbiters are brought on line.

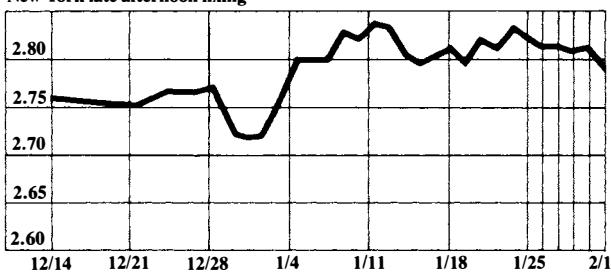
A new start for the Mars Geoscience/Climatology Orbiter is part of the NASA design to begin a new planetary effort each fiscal year, but funding for concomitant space-science programs will have to be increased if the nation is to make use of the information our new planetary probes provide.

Overall, major science and technology decisions, as reflected in the budget requests, have been sabotaged by election-year political considerations which dictate that the President should propose nothing over which he will have to fight with Congress.

Currency Rates

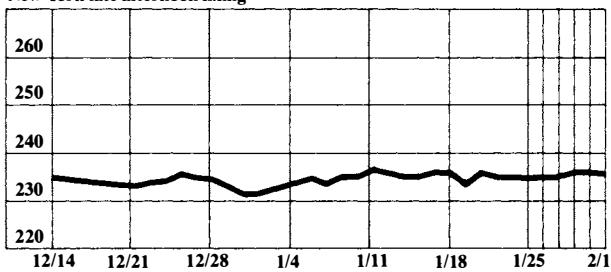
The dollar in deutschmarks

New York late afternoon fixing



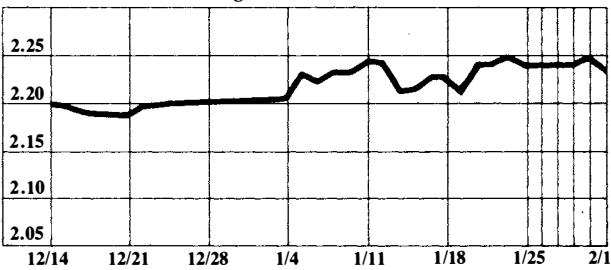
The dollar in yen

New York late afternoon fixing



The dollar in Swiss francs

New York late afternoon fixing



The British pound in dollars

New York late afternoon fixing

