

U.S. State Department to Address Visa Problems

No one ever said the federal government acted quickly. After several years of problems for research institutions and foreign researchers, the U.S. State Department appears ready to address the difficulties foreign graduate students and postdocs encounter in the U.S. visa process.

Delays in obtaining or renewing visas can last for months. They have prohibited some foreign researchers from returning home for vacations and family emergencies. Some researchers who left the U.S. to renew their visas at home have found themselves stranded,

unable to return to work and languishing experiments in the U.S.

Last month, David Donahue, deputy assistant secretary of state for Consular Affairs, told *The New York Times* that the goal was to approve routine requests within two weeks. Donahue said that additional staff was hired to handle visa applications. He also said that the department had reviewed and revised existing procedures in an effort to speed the approval process. ■

—Kevin M. Wilson

Congress Begins Budget Work

The federal budget process is a lot like tennis. In May, the President served Congress a federal budget proposal for FY10. The next step is for Congress to decide what sort of budget they are going to send back to him. Before they do that, they must review his proposal and write and pass 12 individual appropriations bills that will fund the various departments and agencies of the federal government. Then the President will have the ball in his court: He'll have to decide whether to sign each of the 12 bills or send them back to Congress with a veto.

Science and technology play a big role in President Obama's plans for the future, one can deduce from the President's budget proposal. According to his FY10 Budget Overview, "Investments in science and technology foster economic growth; create millions of high-tech, high-wage jobs that allow American workers to lead the global economy; improve the quality of life for all Americans; and strengthen our national security." President Obama clearly sees the value of scientific investment.

The House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies was the first House Committee to

complete its work this year. The Committee approved its FY10 appropriations bill, which includes funding for the National Science Foundation (NSF), National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

In the Subcommittee-approved FY10 bill, NSF, NASA, NIST, and NOAA all received more money than in FY09, but less than the amount requested for FY10 by the President. The Subcommittee approved \$6.936 billion for the NSF for FY10, \$446.1 million more than the FY09 budget, but \$108.5 million less than the amount the President requested.

The Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill now goes to the full House of Representatives after it was approved unanimously by the full House Appropriations Committee, which normally rubber-stamps the work of its subcommittees. The Senate Appropriations Committee is following a similar procedure, although lagging behind its House counterpart. ■

—Kevin M. Wilson

