

Fate of Science Programs Is Unclear if

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By Curt Suplee
Washington Post Staff Writer

House Republicans announced plans to eliminate the Department of Energy on Wednesday, but apparently no one yet knows exactly what would become of DOE's billions of dollars in science programs, which include the entire system of national laboratories, support for high-energy physics, nuclear fusion research and a host of other initiatives including the Human Genome Project.

"We have not decided on a structure" to reassign or fund such programs, House Science Committee Chairman Robert S. Walker (R-Pa.) said yesterday. "We're going to let

the appropriating committees rationalize all this."

Walker favored creating a new "Department of Science" to consolidate the current missions of numerous individual agencies and, presumably, to absorb many of DOE's functions if that agency is abolished. But Walker's idea failed to get committee support, he said. The consensus was that "we wanted to be in the business of eliminating departments, not creating them."

As a result, it is unclear which science programs would be retained, or what alternative departments—if any—would administer them.

As for other agencies, Walker said that the GOP budget plan "protects" the "fundamental science and basic research" that his committee over-

sees. Funding for those would decline from a total of about \$7.1 billion this year to \$6.7 billion in fiscal 2000. Most of the cuts, however, would come from what Walker called "corporate welfare" programs in which government and industry share technology research and development costs. Total research and development programs under Walker's committee's jurisdiction would decline from about \$27 billion this year to about \$21 billion in fiscal 2000.

Because those figures are not adjusted for inflation, the actual effect would be a 35 percent cut over five years, Rep. George E. Brown Jr. (D-Calif.), the committee's former chairman, said in a statement yesterday.

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day. The move would "destroy the investment portfolio of this nation," he said.

DOE's annual outlay for basic and applied research and facilities is about \$2.7 billion—larger than the entire budget of the National Science Foundation. According to DOE estimates, the House Republicans' plan would cut the department's fossil energy research and development by 77 percent over seven years, energy efficiency programs 52 percent, renewable energy projects (including solar and fusion programs) 35 percent, and high-energy physics 9 percent. If enacted, said Martha Krebs, DOE's director of energy research, they "would have a tremendous impact on the human and physi-

cal infrastructure of science in this country."

The House Committee on Science has jurisdiction over NASA and space programs, energy research, environmental research and various agencies such as the National Science Foundation, the National Weather Service and the National Institute of Standards and Technology.

Of the programs within that purview, Walker said, those funding fundamental science and basic research are slated to receive only modest cuts under the GOP plan. The NSF would get a nominal increase to \$3.3 billion for fiscal 2000. But the GOP plan abolishes all "social, behavioral and economic studies" within NSF—

fields that the NSF "wandered into," Walker said, in an attempt to be "politically correct."

NASA's funding would be \$13.7 billion for fiscal 1996, he said, and would shrink to \$11.7 billion by fiscal 2000. However, Walker emphasized, those figures assume that the agency would save about \$1.5 billion by privatizing the space shuttle, and that \$2.7 billion would be saved by scuttling the "Mission to Planet Earth," NASA's once-ambitious satellite program to study global climate change.

Although the GOP plan would eliminate the Commerce Department, NIST's "core" programs would be preserved and funding would rise to \$307 million by 2000.