

US budget yields scant research rises

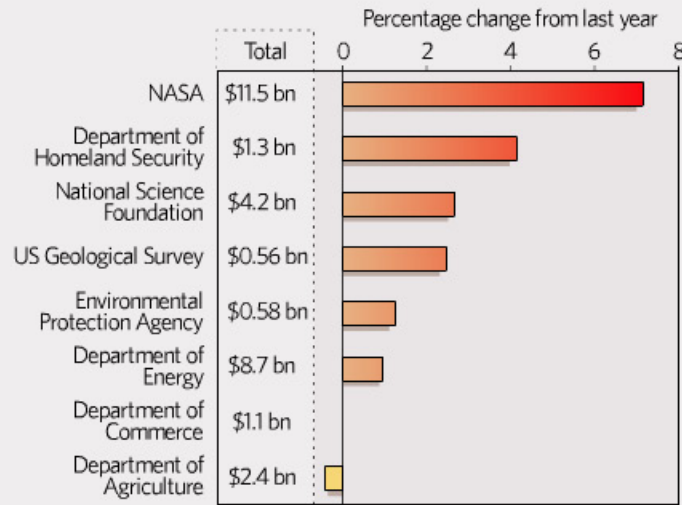
WASHINGTON DC

Key US science agencies held on to slim gains this month as Congress approved next year's budget. But they may lose these rises and more in an across-the-board 2006 spending cut to help pay for hurricane relief in the southern United States and for the ongoing war in Iraq.

Lawmakers base the budget on what the president requests in February of each year (see *Nature* 433, 559-560; 2005), but they have the authority to increase or cut funding and to specify how dollars will be spent.

The National Science Foundation has done relatively well. Last year, the agency's budget was cut by 3%, but this year it was restored by the same amount, to US\$5.6 billion, with \$4.2 billion for research (see graph). Given the tight fiscal environment, this was a reasonable achievement, says Samuel Rankin, who chairs a lobby group, the Coalition for National Science

US RESEARCH BUDGET 2006



Funding. "Under the circumstances, I'm quite pleased," he says.

NASA also did fairly well. Congress gave the space agency \$16.4 billion — nearly as much as the president asked for and 1.3% more than last year. The research budget gets a boost

of 7.3% to keep the early development of launchers and a crew vehicle for lunar expeditions on track. A shuttle mission to repair the Hubble Space Telescope is still in the picture. And lawmakers added money for several projects that the White House had short-changed, including the Space Interferometry Mission to search for planets around other stars and an Earth-science mission known as Glory.

Still, the chairman of the House Committee on Science, Sherwood Boehlert (Republican, New York), warns of trouble ahead as NASA gears up to send astronauts back to the Moon. "A renaissance costs money, and I don't see any Medicis waiting in the wings to underwrite NASA," he said in a 3 November hearing. "There is simply not enough money in NASA's budget to carry out all the tasks it is undertaking on the current schedule."

Small conferences pay their way

SILVERTHORNE, COLORADO

The time and money spent attending small scientific meetings in more

The survey included only Keystone's own meetings, an admittedly transparent attempt to

accelerate publication of some of my data." Nine months later, an e-mail follow-up confirmed whether

scientists anticipated that information they gathered would save them time and money in the