

Firmer support for space science

Our news story on page 73 reports on how it came to be that, while the newscasts about the successes of the US Space Shuttle carry the message that the US is Number 1 in space, the rate of growth in space science experiments being carried out by the US in recent years has fallen off. Although in the 1970s US scientists led the way in space science, today other nations on much more modest budgets are realizing a greater rate of increase in their scientific programs in space than will the US in the 1980s. The main reason for this relative slackening in the growth of US space science is the failure of the Shuttle to fulfill its much-publicized mission as the primary vehicle for space science experiments in the 1980s. In contrast to the hundreds of experiments expected to have flown on the Shuttle by this date, in reality only a handful have made it aboard so far. Certainly there have been unavoidable delays in both the development of the Shuttle itself and in learning how to use the Shuttle to do experiments; and the frustration of getting the Shuttle to fly successfully has led to an emphasis on operations at the expense of science. These factors are understandable—and correctable. However, we understand that recent Shuttles have still flown with empty space that could have carried experiments.

Although our news story reports that NASA spokesmen point to a 20% increase in funding for space science in FY 85, it is not clear how far the extra money will go to dispel the disillusionment of the 20-odd university research groups that hoped to be flying on the Shuttle by now. At NASA the recently formed NASA-Universities Committee (co-chaired by Space Science Board Chairman Thomas Dohanue and NASA Chief Scientist Frank McDonald) in an interim report made three principal recommendations for additional funds: graduate fellowships, university data analysis and university research-equipment modernization. The Administration has *not* included the modernization program (to have cost a mere \$11 million per year) in the NASA FY 85 budget of \$7.5 billion and is still looking at what can be done for the other two. This less than whole-hearted support for the recommendations of NASA's own space-science

experts does not inspire confidence in the Administration's interest in space science. This year space scientists will have to turn to Congress to support in full the recommendations of the NASA committee.

But the Administration will have a second chance in FY 86. A working group of the NASA-Universities Committee is studying specifically how to make more effective use of the Shuttle for space science and will make recommendations in time for FY 86. Of course, FY 86 will include more funding for the next big manned US effort—the Space Station. It is understandable if space scientists are concerned that their interests may be squeezed out once again by the focus of attention on this successor to the Shuttle. We urge the Administration to make it clear to everyone, in planning for FY 86 over the next several months, that the US intends both to build the Space Station and to maintain a strong leadership in space science.

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