

EPSCOR has helped fund research for 132 faculty members and five research associates in Kentucky, in fields ranging from low-energy nuclear science to genetic engineering to economic modeling. At the University of Alabama at Huntsville, Mau-Kuen Wu was partly funded by EPSCOR in his experiments in high-temperature superconductivity. Lothar Schaffer of the University of Arkansas has received awards for his electron diffraction device developed under EPSCOR. Victor Kwong of the University of Nevada at Las Vegas was invited to do collaborative research with the Harvard-Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory in plasma physics. This "couldn't have happened without EPSCOR," he says.

Four rounds of EPSCOR awards have been given since the program's beginning. In the first round of competition in 1980, up to \$3 million was awarded over a five-year period to each of five states out of the seven initially eligible. NSF intended these awards to be a one-time experiment. But in fiscal 1985 Congress reauthorized and expanded the program to include nine more states and Puerto Rico. Eight more awards were granted in 1985, leaving four EPSCOR states whose proposals had not been funded. All four states—Idaho, Louisiana, Mississippi and South Dakota—received special assistance grants in 1987.

The foundation intends to build on EPSCOR past successes by granting follow-on awards to programs that have done well under EPSCOR so far. To prepare all current participants for the 1991 grants, the foundation provided \$1.2 million in 1990 to each of the original five winners whose grants had run out by then, to bring them up to speed with states that won more recent awards.

Is giving money to the disadvantaged science and engineering community to help them help themselves a productive use of research funds? Senator John Danforth, a Missouri Republican and senior minority member of the Senate science research subcommittee, believes it is. At a June 1990 hearing on pork-barrel tactics, Danforth testified that the Federal government has the responsibility to spend its research dollars "in the most productive way. We should be buying only the highest quality research . . . If we squander our limited research dollars on projects that have not been subject to merit review . . . we doom the entire system to mediocrity." Nevertheless, he said, less advantaged institutions should be helped "through established pro-

grams [like] EPSCOR" that are based on merit. Donald Langenberg, chancellor of the University of Maryland and former deputy director of NSF, says "the key is not the money, it's the attitudinal changes the money helps to bring about."

Although the program has been successful at increasing the number of faculty in EPSCOR states, its cumulative effect on a state's ability to compete for R&D funds is harder to assess. While it is not uncommon for EPSCOR states to report that the program has helped 70% to 80% of their researchers win Federal support, it

has had little effect on the national rankings of those states as a group in terms of Federal R&D funding.

The foundation currently has no procedure for determining the states capable of competing on equal terms with the top-ranked states. It has no policy, beyond the whim of Congress, to specify how and when to add states. Belatedly, NSF is trying to develop a system of evaluation. It plans to prepare a database to produce state and institutional profiles of funding obtained through EPSCOR for comparison with national norms.

—AUDREY T. LEATH

DEMOCRATS PICK GEORGE BROWN TO HEAD HOUSE SCIENCE COMMITTEE

By choosing George E. Brown Jr as chairman of the Committee on Science, Space and Technology for the 102nd Congress, Democrats in the House of Representatives sent a message of hope to the scientific community. Brown is one of the few members of Congress who seriously places science and technology above all else on his legislative agenda. It wasn't only Democrats who hailed Brown's ascendancy. Brown, says Representative Don Ritter, a Republican of Pennsylvania, "brings to the committee a new sense of purpose, priorities and performance."

Leaders of scientific and academic organizations also expect Brown to be a more effective and sympathetic proponent for their issues than the committee's previous chairman, Robert A. Roe, a New Jersey Democrat. Roe became chairman of the House Committee on Public Works and Transportation, a job he has coveted for years. Roe was openly criticized in

the committee for not moving more quickly last spring on the 1991 NASA authorization bill, which sets policy and direction for the space agency. Brown, something of a loner who subscribes to no orthodoxy and shuns bombast and bickering, did little to discourage the view in political and scientific circles that the committee had grown increasingly irrelevant.

On 5 December, Brown was elected as the sixth chairman in the committee's history by a vote of 166 to 33, overcoming a last-minute challenge by Marilyn Lloyd of Tennessee, another devoted committee member.

Brown received a BS in applied physics from UCLA in 1946, after Army service in World War II, and completed some graduate studies in nuclear engineering and in political science on a Ford Foundation grant in the early 1950s. Before entering Congress in 1962 he was employed by the City of Los Angeles in engineering and management positions, as well as working in management consulting.

"Chairing the science committee will be unquestionably the most exciting challenge of my career," Brown said in an interview the day after his selection. "It comes at a time when our nation's technological base faces increasing competition, when global environmental problems are approaching crisis proportions and when we are beginning to rethink the research and development priorities that guided us throughout the cold war." His priorities in this Congress, he said, include setting realistic objectives for the US space program, deciding how best to proceed with the Superconducting Super Collider, developing practical alternatives to fossil fuels and finding ways to improve pre-college science education.

—IRWIN GOODWIN ■



Brown: Seeking increased relevance.