

## Confirmation of US science posts lets Colwell in at NSF



[WASHINGTON] The US Senate has confirmed appointments to several key science policy positions in the Clinton administration, ending fears that nominations would be held up until September or even later.

Neal Lane (above), former director of the National Science Foundation (NSF), was confirmed unanimously on 31 July as director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP). Rosina Bierbaum was confirmed as OSTP associate director for environment. Bill Richardson, US ambassador to the United Nations and former New Mexico congressman, was confirmed as energy secretary.

Lane's confirmation will allow Rita Colwell, a marine biologist from the University of Maryland, to take over as the first woman and the first biologist to head the NSF. The confirmations took place on the last day before the Senate left town for its August recess.

## Gore pledges \$38 million for smoking research

[WASHINGTON] The US vice-president Al Gore has announced that \$38 million will be spent over the next two years on research at the National Cancer Institute into smoking prevention and cessation. In a speech last week to a conference on nicotine addiction at the National Institutes of Health, Gore excoriated the tobacco industry for "consciously lying" for decades about nicotine's addictive nature.

The research funds — including money to study the genetics of nicotine addiction — represent "not just a policy priority, but... a moral obligation", Gore told the conference, co-sponsored by the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Thomas Lauria, a spokesman for the Tobacco Institute, a trade group, called Gore's accusations "specious... political bluster" devoid of content.

## At long last: molecular pharmacology clarified

[MUNICH] To help bring some scientific order to the mushrooming field of molecular pharmacology, the International Union of Pharmacologists last week launched its definitive *Compendium of Receptor Characterization and Classification* at its thirteenth international congress in Munich.

Its aim is to describe the characteristics of cloned hormone and neurotransmitter receptors at a time when more data are being generated than ever before and terminology is inconsistent and confusing. Each receptor in the compendium is allocated a receptor code, analogous to the enzyme codes introduced in the 1950s by the International Union of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. The receptor codes convey both structural and operational information.

## 'Too much secrecy' at Dounreay, say MPs

[LONDON] An all-party British parliamentary committee last week supported the government's decision in April to receive a consignment of mostly fresh nuclear fuel from Georgia at the nuclear reprocessing plant at Dounreay in Scotland. But members of the House of Commons Trade and Industry select committee concluded in their report that 'there remains too great a culture of secrecy' at and around the facility. Britain agreed to accept the material following concerns about its safety in Georgia. However, the decision was not made public until after the nuclear fuel had arrived in Scotland (see *Nature* 392, 850; 1998).

## Russia to pay up money owed to scientists

[MOSCOW] The Russian government has promised to pay all debts to the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS) this month. The agreement follows negotiations with trade unions from RAS. The finance ministry will transfer 1 billion roubles (\$160 million) to RAS accounts: 800 million roubles for salaries and the rest to cover debts for the second quarter of 1998. Viktor Kalinushkin, an RAS trade-union leader, says scientists may join striking miners, teachers and nuclear workers this autumn "if the cabinet fails to fulfil this agreement".

## Animal guidelines annoy Indian researchers

[NEW DELHI] Proposed guidelines on the use of animals in research and a proposal to ban the import of laboratory animals are causing resentment among researchers in India. Under the guidelines, no institute will be able to acquire or use animals in research without the permission of a government regulatory committee. Animal experiments for teaching and training are also banned.

The guidelines are understood to be the work of Maneka Gandhi, the welfare minister, who is an ardent animal activist. Gandhi also chairs the Committee for the Purpose of Control and Supervision of Experiments on Animals.

Sandip Basu, director of the National

Institute of Immunology in New Delhi, describes the proposed rules as "ridiculous". Another leading scientist fears this will shut down animal experimentation.

## Britain delays controls on sale of vitamin B6

[LONDON] The British government is to delay plans to restrict the sale of vitamin B6 by at least 18 months. The decision follows last month's report by the House of Commons agriculture select committee, which said the plans were based on flawed science.

A new expert group on vitamins and minerals has been charged with investigating the safety of the vitamin. Plans to restrict sales were based on advice from the government's advisory committee on toxic chemicals in food, which had based its advice on research that claimed that high doses caused side effects such as numbness (see *Nature* 389, 7; 1997).

The agriculture select committee concluded that the committee on toxic chemicals seemed unable to distinguish between good and bad science.

## Brussels seeks 25 per cent cut in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions

[LONDON] The European Commission wants Europe's automobile industry to make a 25 per cent reduction in carbon dioxide emissions from all new cars within a decade. The requirement, if backed by European Union member states, will commit car makers to reducing carbon dioxide emissions from 185 grammes per kilometre in 1995 to 140 grammes per kilometre in 2008.

The 15 member states have agreed collectively to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 8 per cent by 2010.

## Greenpeace 'tried to buy an atom bomb'

[MUNICH] The environmentalist group Greenpeace tried to buy an atomic bomb for \$250,000 from a Russian army officer in 1991, according to a former US military intelligence officer who joined the group in 1989. Breaking years of silence, William Arkin said last week that Greenpeace wanted to publicize the ease with which nuclear weapons in the former Soviet Union could fall into the hands of despots or terrorists.

Arkin says that a 29-year-old Russian officer had claimed that he could steal a warhead from an arsenal in East Germany and deliver it to Greenpeace before escaping to Sweden. But he vanished without trace before the deal came off.

"Since the whole action failed at such an early stage we felt no need to inform the public," says Norbert Schnorbach, a spokesman for Greenpeace Germany.