

## SCORECARD

**Biodiesel buses**

Passengers in the UK town of Kilmarnock are getting a 20p (41¢) discount on their bus fare if they bring their used cooking oil, which is converted into biodiesel for the fleet.

**Solar-powered cars**

Competitors from Stanford (below) and Michigan universities were left red-faced after both teams' cars suffered accidents in the World Solar Challenge race in Australia.



PANASONIC WORLD SOLAR CHALLENGE

## ON THE RECORD

**“Science changes with every generation and with new discoveries and God doesn't. So I'll stick with God if the two are in conflict.”**

Republican presidential candidate Mike Huckabee fails to cover all the bases in the science-religion debate.

## ZOO NEWS

## Deep time

A clam dredged up off the Icelandic coast that seems to have been there for as much as 410 years has been hailed as the longest-lived animal ever discovered. Of course, it might have lived even longer if it hadn't been dredged up and given to age researchers...

## NUMBER CRUNCH

**33%** of Swedes have visited one of the country's three nuclear power plants since they were opened to tourists 35 years ago.

**80%** of Swedes are “comfortable” with the country's continued use of nuclear energy.

**275** safety actions are under way at the Forsmark nuclear plant, after an emergency shutdown in July 2006.

Sources: BBC, *The Stanford Daily*, *Univ. Michigan Solar Car Blog*, *Salon.com*, Reuters

# White House adviser linked to cuts in climate-change report

The chief science adviser to President George W. Bush came under fire last week for his role in watering down congressional testimony on the health effects of global warming.

Julie Gerberding, director of the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia, had briefed senators on the subject at a hearing on 23 October. As required, she submitted her written testimony

24 hours in advance to the White House — which then proceeded to chop it in half. Detailed comments from the office of John Marburger, the president's science adviser and director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), may have played a part.

Six pages of missing material focused on a range of potential public-health impacts related to climate change. These included the effects of heat waves, air pollution, extreme weather and infectious diseases. The original testimony also indicated that children, the elderly and the poor would bear the brunt of the impact, and suggested that these problems “remain largely unaddressed”.

Officials at the Centers for Disease Control maintain that Gerberding's testimony was accurate and complete, especially when combined with what she told the committee verbally. But congressional Democrats and advocacy groups immediately denounced the White House, citing a history of allegations that the administration has misrepresented science in order to promote its own policies.

“Considering the track record, this administration should be bending over backwards to allow critical scientific evidence to reach the public,” says Tim Donaghy of the Union of Concerned Scientists, an advocacy group based in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Marburger insists that his office did not seek to cut the report, but instead made “substantive and constructive comments and suggestions”. Those comments were passed to the White House Office of Management and Budget, which coordinates such agency reviews. Owing to time constraints, the budget office elected to strike the sections rather than revise the

testimony, according to OSTP officials.

Donaghy acknowledges that Marburger's comments are technically accurate, but he says the administration had a responsibility to correct the errors rather than cutting the meat out of the testimony. “The topic of the hearing was climate change and public health,” he says. “It's not too much to ask to have them submit testimony on that particular topic.”

The budget office referred all questions on the matter to the White House press office, which declined to discuss the issue.

At the time *Nature* went to press, the OSTP had said that it would not release the full version of its suggested edits, as such reviews were an “internal process”. But in a written statement, Marburger offered several examples of what he called an “overall lack of precision” in the proposed testimony, and cited what he claimed were technical conflicts with

the latest assessment by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

For instance, Marburger flagged a statement indicating that global warming is expected to alter the “frequency, timing, intensity and duration of extreme weather events such as hurricanes and floods”. But researchers have made links between global warming and hurricanes primarily for storm intensity, and even on that point there remains considerable debate.

Marburger also said that the report improperly characterized certain global impacts as domestic impacts, and failed to acknowledge that, in some cases such as agriculture, the impact in the United States might be beneficial. He also noted that the effects on mental health anticipated by the IPCC relate to post-disaster trauma, not the anticipation of global warming as stated in the testimony.

Senator Barbara Boxer (Democrat, California), who chairs the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works that called Gerberding to testify, has asked the White House for copies of all records related to the testimony. She calls Marburger's explanation a “lame defence”.

Jeff Tollefson

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John Marburger says global-warming testimony 'lacked precision'.

M. EULER/AP