



Andrew von Eschenbach: permanently in charge at the US Food and Drug Administration.

Senate vote ends months of waiting for FDA head

The US Senate last week finally confirmed Andrew von Eschenbach as commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Although von Eschenbach was nominated in March, the vote to confirm his position had been blocked by two Republican senators, Chuck Grassley (Iowa) and David Vitter (Louisiana). Senate leaders used a procedural vote to override the pair.

Von Eschenbach, a urologic surgeon, is a former director of the National Cancer Institute and has been acting head of the FDA since September 2005.

The confirmation means that the \$1.9-billion agency once again has a permanent head — a situation it has enjoyed for just 18 months during George W. Bush's tenure in the White House.

NIH researcher confesses to breach of ethics

An Alzheimer's researcher at the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) pleaded guilty on 8 December to a criminal conflict-of-interest charge.

Trey Sunderland, who led a geriatric unit at the National Institute of Mental Health, has been a focal point of congressional inquiries into allegations of conflicts of interest at the NIH.

Federal prosecutors said that Sunderland accepted \$285,000 in consulting fees from the drug company Pfizer without approval from his NIH bosses. They added that Sunderland failed to properly report travel expenses and consulting income from Pfizer that "directly related" to his federally funded research.

Having struck a deal with prosecutors, Sunderland faces two years of probation, 400 hours of community service and a fine to be set by the judge. He will also have to repay the government the \$300,000 in fees and travel expenses he collected from Pfizer.

President quits California's stem-cell institute

California's \$3-billion stem-cell research institute is in need of a new head following the resignation of president and chief scientific officer, Zach Hall.

Hall, who has led the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM) since its creation by state ballot in 2004, announced last week that he intends to retire some time in the next six months. "My job was to get things started," Hall says.

His departure comes as the CIRM is, indeed, making some progress as a grant-making agency after being mired in litigation (see *Nature* 437, 800–801; 2005). A state loan of \$150 million and nonprofit-financed bonds have allowed it to begin issuing research grants even though legal action against it is continuing.

Correction

The Special Report "Anti-evolutionists raise their profile in Europe" (*Nature* 444, 406–407; 2006) stated incorrectly that the University of Leeds plans to introduce remedial courses on evolution for first-year science students. The courses are in fact part of a core lecture module on evolution, introduced to give second-year students sufficient evidence and confidence to debate evolution in schools, universities or society in general.