

NEWS BRIEFING

● POLICY

Genetic regulation: Genetic tests marketed directly to consumers are medical devices, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has decided. On 10 June it told five companies that the tests must therefore gain regulatory approval before they can be marketed — but did not ask that the tests be taken off the market. The FDA sent letters to Navigenics, 23andMe and deCODE Genetics, which sell the tests, together with the sequencing company Illumina and Knome, which offers whole-genome sequencing. See also Editorial, page 845.

European merger: The European Science Foundation (ESF) is planning to merge with EUHORCS, a group made up of the heads of Europe's national research councils. The two organizations will combine leadership and resources to form a body provisionally titled the European Research Organisation (ERO). The aim is for this group to be more active in driving European research priorities and strategic concepts such as the European Research Area, which seeks the free movement of researchers and funding across national borders.

Bonn bust: Almost two weeks of interim climate talks in Bonn, Germany, ended on 11 June with little progress towards an international climate deal. No agreement was reached between rich and poor countries on the content of a negotiation text for the United Nations climate summit later this year in Cancun, Mexico. Negotiations continue in Bonn in August.

Climate vote: The US Senate voted 53–47 on 10 June against a resolution by Lisa Murkowski (Republican, Alaska) to block the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) from implementing climate

DUST FROM AN ASTEROID?

Japanese scientists are hoping for their first peek at asteroid dust from a space capsule (pictured) that landed near Woomera, Australia, after being jettisoned by Japan's Hayabusa explorer, which returned to Earth on 13 June. The probe's seven-year mission to gather samples from the 535-metre-long asteroid Itokawa was the first round trip to a planetary body beyond the Moon. The capsule will be transported to a laboratory in Sagami, Japan; any captured dust could undergo preliminary analysis by the end of this week. See go.nature.com/vMkRSC for more.

regulations under the Clean Air Act. It was the first major climate vote in the Senate in two years, although it was largely symbolic because the resolution stood little chance of passing the House of Representatives or the White House. Senate Democrats are still hoping to bring up climate legislation this summer, but if Congress fails to act, the EPA expects to begin rolling out new climate regulations next year. See go.nature.com/m58gPT for more.

Moon work cut: NASA has told contractors to scale back work on a suite of rockets to carry astronauts to the Moon — even though Congress has not agreed to the cutback. In the presidential budget request in February, NASA announced plans to cancel the rockets, called Constellation, in favour of supporting rockets developed by commercial companies. But members of Congress, who must authorize and pay for the switch, have resisted. NASA administrator Charles Bolden sent a letter to Kay Bailey Hutchison (Republican, Texas), a key senator, on 9 June saying that he was trying to “pace, rather than terminate” contractual work.



UN biosphere body: A new United Nations organization will monitor the planet's natural resources. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) was approved by representatives in Busan, South Korea, last week. See page 859 for more.

JAXA/AP

● BUSINESS

Clinical-trial reporting: The International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations has adopted new guidelines governing the publication of clinical-trial results. The policy calls for the industry to publish the results of late-stage, phase III clinical trials in peer-reviewed journals, regardless of the outcome of trials, and to acknowledge any ghostwriters (who are hired to work on papers without being credited as authors). But some researchers say that the guidelines, announced on 10 June, do not go far enough and may have little effect because they are voluntary. See go.nature.com/6kAcSW for more.

IBM in Brazil: Computing and technology giant IBM is to open a research laboratory in Brazil, it

SOUND BITES

“I do not believe we will ever have a final agreement on climate change, certainly not in my lifetime.”

Christiana Figueres, who will become UN climate chief on 8 July, told reporters on 9 June that governments should focus on incremental efforts to combat climate change, rather than a conclusive agreement.

announced on 8 June. The centre would be the company's ninth global research laboratory, its first new one for 12 years, and its first in South America. It is already hiring scientists for the lab, which will be home to more than 100 researchers; costs and the precise location were not disclosed. Research will focus on natural-resource discovery, semiconductors and the logistics of managing 'human systems' at large-scale events such as the Olympics.

Gene patents challenged: A patent covering cancer-related mutations in the *BRCA1* gene has again come under fire, this time in Australia. On 8 June, the Melbourne-based law firm Maurice Blackburn, together with the patient-advocacy group Cancer Voices Australia in Sydney and a breast-cancer patient, filed a federal case against the patent's holders Myriad Genetics, headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah, and Genetic Technologies of Melbourne. In March, a New York district court ruled that some claims in the same patent were invalid (see *Nature*, 464, 655; 2010).

Publishing dispute: The University of California is considering a boycott of Nature Publishing Group (NPG) in response to what it says is a proposed 400% increase in subscription fees to the group's journals. Faculty members would be asked to stop submitting papers to and peer-reviewing for NPG journals, and to resign from its editorial boards, said a letter from the university's

NUMBER CRUNCH

68%

Percentage of Americans who don't remember hearing or reading anything in the news about the furore over climate e-mails in the past six months. Despite this, public belief in anthropogenic climate change has waned in the United States.

Source: Stanford University poll; available at go.nature.com/ArgW19

libraries, dated 4 June. NPG stated that California Digital Library has been on "a very large, unsustainable discount for many years". The dispute continues. See go.nature.com/2QpBzl for more.

EVENTS

Space sail: Japan's Ikaros space capsule unfurled its solar sail last week, beginning the disc-shaped craft's journey through deep

space. The 7.5-micrometre thick, 200-square-metre polyimide sail aims to show for the first time that a spacecraft can be propelled by photons from the Sun.



Oil-spill numbers: Depressing images of oil-covered birds and marine animals (pictured, a turtle being treated at the University of California, Davis) marked a week in which official estimates for the amount of oil leaking into the Gulf of Mexico from BP's crippled well rose to between 25,000 and 40,000 barrels per day (4 million to 6.4 million litres). The previous estimate was between 12,000 and 19,000 barrels, itself raised from 5,000 barrels in May. BP says that it is currently capturing around 15,000 barrels of the total.

PEOPLE

Solar award: Swiss solar-cell scientist Michael Grätzel has won the €800,000 (US\$969,000) Millennium Technology Prize. Grätzel, of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne, developed the technology of dye-sensitized solar cells, which use organic dyes rather than silicon to capture sunlight. First awarded in 2004, the biennial Millennium Prize styles itself as "the world's

THE WEEK AHEAD

17-18 JUNE

Approval of 'Europe 2020' — a ten-year economic strategy for the European Union — is expected at a meeting of the European Council in Brussels. The document's drafts suggest worthy targets for European research spending (see *Nature* 464, 142; 2010).

go.nature.com/R9Z3vJ

22-23 JUNE

A government- and industry-attended summit in Washington DC will review technical progress on scaling up production of advanced biofuels. It hopes to thrash out a global regulatory and financial framework to help commercialize the technology.

go.nature.com/8paTK5

22-25 JUNE

A Western Pacific Geophysics meeting in Taipei, Taiwan, includes research on one of the Western Pacific's most devastating cyclones, 2009's Typhoon Morakot.

go.nature.com/WvNpR5

largest technology prize". Two runner-up prizes of €150,000 were awarded this year to Richard Friend of the University of Cambridge, UK, for his work on plastic electronics, and Stephen Furber of the University of Manchester, UK, designer of the ARM 32-bit RISC microprocessor.

FUNDING WATCH

An attempt to quantify government funding for synthetic biology suggests that the United States has spent around US\$430 million on the sector since 2005, whereas the European Union and three European countries (the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Germany) have spent a total of around \$160 million (see chart).

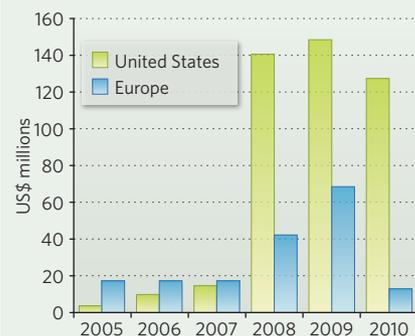
But the main lesson from the analysis, released on 4 June by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington DC, is that transparent and accurate numbers are hard to come by. "Although governments are funding synthetic biology, there is no easy way to determine the total amount of resources, both human and financial, that are being dedicated

to it," the report notes. Analysts combed federal research grant databases for the term 'synthetic biology', and hope that research agencies will now be spurred to provide more comprehensive information than they could when first asked, says Todd Kuiken, a research associate at the Wilson Center.

The report suggests that the US Department of Energy dominates agency spending, thanks to its push to develop new biofuels. And although 4% of US and 2% of European funds were apportioned to investigating the ethical, legal or societal implications of synthetic biology, no projects in the grant databases used funds for research on risk assessment.

SYNTHETIC-BIOLOGY SPENDING

A preliminary report tries to quantify public funding on synthetic-biology research.



SOURCE: WOODROW WILSON CENTER