NEWS BRIEFING

POLICY

US drops climate bill: Democrats in the US Senate abandoned plans to push for legislation on global warming, acknowledging that they do not have enough votes to overcome staunch Republican opposition. The decision to push for a narrower energy bill only, announced by Senate Democratic leader Harry Reid (Nevada) on 22 July, makes it increasingly likely that the administration of President Barack Obama will continue with climate regulation through the Environmental Protection Agency — such as enforcing greenhouse-gas emission restrictions for major industrial polluters.

Russia spaceport: The Russian government will set aside 25 billion roubles (US$820 million) for the construction of a new spaceport in the country's far eastern region, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin announced on 19 July. The Vostochny ('Eastern') cosmodrome in the Amur region, close to the Chinese border, is intended to reduce Russia's dependence on the Baikonur launch site, which is in the former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan. Expected to be ready by 2015, the site would become the country's prime spaceport for civilian use.

Genetic-test regulation: A US congressional hearing on 22 July saw genetic-testing companies 23andMe, Navigenics and Pathmark Genomics defend their practices against accusations in a report released by the Government Accountability Office that day. The report said that test results varied between companies and that interpretations given were not grounded in science. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is discussing plans for regulating tests marketed directly to consumers: on 19 July it sent letters to 14 genetic-testing companies, informing them that the tests are medical devices and must therefore have FDA approval. Five other companies received similar letters in June.

UK medical regulation: A new medical-research regulator could be created in the United Kingdom, combining the functions of several existing bodies, the country's coalition government suggested on 26 July. Announcing a cost-saving shake-up of the semi-governmental bodies that regulate research at present, health secretary Andrew Lansley said that the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (which regulates the use of embryos in research) and the Human Tissue Authority (which takes a similar role for other tissues) would be eliminated. A final decision on a new regulator is expected in the autumn, after an independent review of medical-research regulation.

S. GARDNER/EPA/CORBIS

HAYWARD STEPS DOWN FROM BP

Oil giant BP confirmed this week that chief executive Tony Hayward will step down from 1 October. He will be replaced by Robert Dudley, who is currently running the unit dealing with clean-up operations and compensation for the Gulf of Mexico oil spill. BP said on 27 July that it had set aside US$32.2 billion to deal with the spill, of which it had spent $2.9 billion so far. Those costs contributed to a gross loss of $17.2 billion in the second quarter of this year, it reported. Meanwhile, the US government acknowledged on 23 July what scientists first reported nearly 2 months ago: that a deep plume of diffuse oil was spreading away from the leaking well, and concentrations of dissolved oxygen in the vicinity were lower than expected. The report, by the cross-agency Joint Analysis Group, said oxygen levels weren't low enough to be of concern. For more on BP and scientists, see page 538.

SOUND BITES

"We need to recover our sense of outrage."

Michel Sidibé, executive director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, told an international AIDS conference in Vienna that political will to fund AIDS treatment is waning. See also page 539.

Source: Reuters

Australian climate assembly: Australia's prime minister, Julia Gillard, says that if she is re-elected she will ask 150 citizen volunteers to examine the evidence on climate change and gauge the public consensus on a carbon-trading scheme that was shelved by her predecessor, Kevin Rudd, who stepped down on 24 June. Gillard announced the plan on 23 July; she had earlier confirmed that there would be no government action on the carbon-trading scheme until 2012. She faces national elections on 21 August.

PEOPLE

Cancer controversy: Three clinical trials on cancer treatment have been suspended by Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, after allegations that a researcher on the trials may have falsely claimed to be a Rhodes scholar. Cancer researcher Anil Potti was the first author on a

2006 paper (A. Potti *et al. Nature Med.* **12,** 1294–1300; 2006) linking gene-expression patterns in cancer cells with sensitivity to chemotherapy. Duke's clinical trials were based on this paper, which statisticians have since attacked for faulty analysis. Potti has been placed on administrative leave and did not respond to interview requests. On 23 July, *Lancet Oncology* announced that it would investigate another paper on which Potti was an author (H. Bonnefoi *et al. Lancet Oncol.* **8,** 1071–1078; 2007) after co-authors expressed concern about the work.

Science bloggers protest: Around 20 scientists and science writers abandoned one of the Internet's leading science-blog websites last week. Writers at ScienceBlogs, owned by Seed Media Group in New York City, had been publicly voicing discontent since the site's launch earlier in July of a blog on nutrition sponsored by the soft drinks and snacks giant PepsiCo. See go.nature.com/e9cWfd for more.

NUMBER CRUNCH

31 Gt

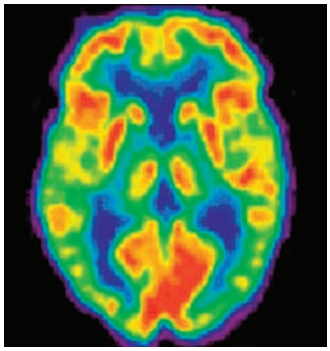
Mass of carbon dioxide emissions that could be offset if every roof in the world's urban areas was coated to reflect more of the Sun's heat. US energy secretary Steven Chu announced last week that 'cool roofs' would be rolled out on agency facilities and buildings across the federal government.

Source: S. Menon et al. Environ. Res. Lett. ***5,*** *014005 (2010).*

RESEARCH

European research conduct: A voluntary code of conduct for European researchers was presented on 21 July at the World Conference on Research Integrity in Singapore. The document (see www.esf.org/publications) was drawn up by the European Science Foundation (ESF), an association of 79 European science bodies, to help guard against fraud and malpractice. It is aimed at providing uniform national guidelines for countries that do not already have nationwide codes of good research practice, such as Slovakia. ESF members will meet in October to discuss how to implement the code, which might involve adding it to employment contracts.

Brain-imaging warning: The suspension of work at a leading US brain-imaging centre,



SCIENTIFICA, VISUALS UNLIMITED/SPL

because researchers had injected impure psychiatric drugs into clinical-trial volunteers, should prompt other centres to review their practices, radiologists said last week. Radioisotope-labelled drugs can be tracked by PET scans (pictured). But an investigation by the Food and Drug Administration found that the drugs used by researchers at Columbia University's Kreitchman PET Center in New York repeatedly failed purity tests. David Hirsh, Columbia's executive vice-president for research, told *The New York Times* that the university was now "fundamentally reorganizing the lab's management and operations". See go.nature.com/ibGcj5 for more.

BUSINESS

Generic biotech: The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has finally approved a generic form of the blood thinner Lovenox, five years after it was filed with the agency. The 23 July decision came after a contentious battle between the generic's makers — Momenta Pharmaceuticals in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in collaboration with Sandoz, the generics arm of Switzerland-based Novartis — and French drug-maker Sanofi-aventis, which made €3.04 billion (US$3.9 billion) in sales from Lovenox in 2009. Because the drug is a complicated mixture of sugar molecules, its approval was seen as a key step in the agency's stance on biosimilars, generic copies of complex biological drugs — although the FDA does not technically consider Lovenox a biologic. Sanofi is challenging the approval in a District of Columbia court.

THE WEEK AHEAD

29–31 JULY
Advocates of open-source science projects, in which data are shared free of intellectual-property restrictions, meet in Berkeley, California, for the first Open Science Summit.
http://opensciencesummit.com

1–6 AUGUST
The effects of global warming dominate the agenda at the 95th annual meeting of the Ecological Society of America in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
www.esa.org/pittsburgh

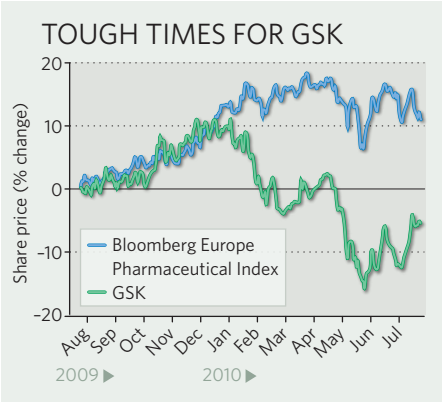
2–6 AUGUST
At the 'Darkness Visible' conference in Cambridge, UK, particle- and astrophysicists gather to discuss progress in the detection and understanding of dark matter.
www.ast.cam.ac.uk/meetings/dv10

BUSINESS WATCH

All eyes were on GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) this month, as the London-based drugmaker's controversial diabetes drug Avandia faced scrutiny by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) following reports that it increases the risk of heart attacks. GSK stock rose after most members of an FDA advisory panel voted on 14 July to leave the drug on the market. But although shareholders were pleased, GSK's second quarter financial results, reported a week later, showed that the negative publicity had taken its toll: US sales of Avandia dropped by 33%.

In all, GSK lost £304 million (US$471.5 million) in the second quarter, a dramatic shift from last year's £1.44-billion second-quarter profit. Hefty legal fees played a major part: on 15 July, GSK announced that it would pay £1.57 billion to settle lawsuits, mainly over Avandia and the antidepressant Paxil.

This year poses yet more difficulties for GSK, with mounting pressure from generics. The company's stock dipped below the Bloomberg Europe Pharmaceutical Index last December (see chart), shortly after a generic version of GSK's herpes virus drug Valtrex hit US markets on 25 November. GSK made £1.3 billion from global Valtrex sales in 2009. Several more GSK drugs face US patent expiration in 2010, the biggest being Advair, an asthma drug whose global sales earned £5 billion last year.



SOURCE: BLOOMBERG