

SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

POLICY

US immigration bill

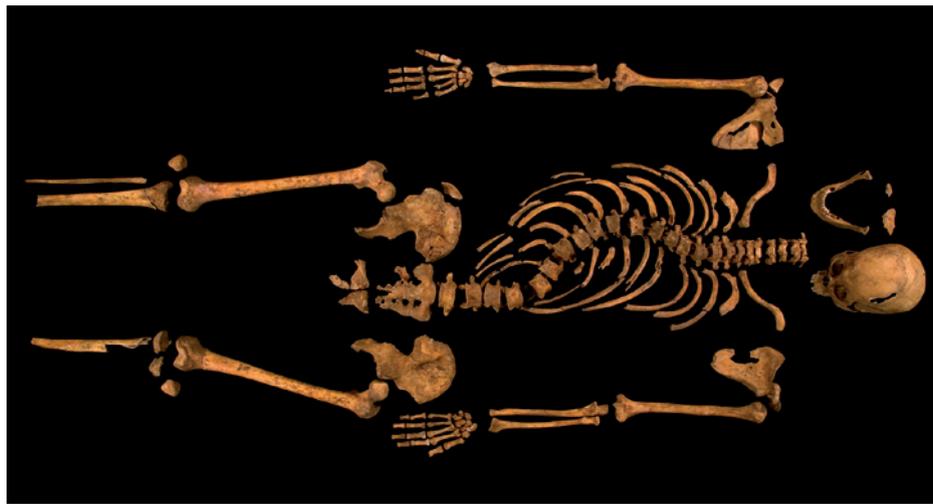
In a bid to attract and retain more skilled workers, US lawmakers introduced legislation on 29 January that is intended to ease current immigration limits. Under the proposed law, several groups would be exempted from the annual cap of 140,000 employment-based visas — including foreigners who earn advanced degrees in science, technology, engineering and mathematics in the United States, as well as outstanding professors and researchers. The Senate measure follows close on the heels of immigration-reform plans announced by lawmakers and President Barack Obama. See go.nature.com/zafspz for more.

Insecticide ban

The European Commission has proposed a two-year suspension of the use of insecticides that have been linked to declines in honeybees. If the proposal is accepted by European Union member states, three neonicotinoids — imidacloprid, thiamethoxam and clothianidin — would be banned from use on oilseed rape, sunflower, maize (corn) and cotton. Member states are likely to vote on the idea on 25 February. The move follows a report from the European Food Safety Authority in Parma, Italy, that highlighted concerns over neonicotinoid use. See go.nature.com/v3zdne for more.

UK nuclear waste

Plans for a deep repository to hold nuclear waste are on hold in Britain, following a vote on 30 January by Cumbria County Council to block further investigations at the only candidate site.



UNIV. LEICESTER

King Richard III unearthed

Archaeologists at the University of Leicester, UK, announced on 4 February that a skeleton uncovered last September is that of Richard III, a fifteenth-century king of England. The most telling sign was the skeleton's curved spine (pictured), a deformity immortalized in

Shakespeare's unflattering portrayal of the king. But the team cited other pieces of evidence, including the location of the burial; the fact that the body had apparently suffered numerous wounds; carbon dating; and mitochondrial DNA. See go.nature.com/cbysgv and page 6 for more.

The detailed geological investigations would have been precursors to building the £12-billion (US\$19-billion) underground facility. "I do not feel that we have the support of most of the people of Cumbria," Eddie Martin, the Conservative leader of the council, told BBC News. "We needed much more certainty and assurance about the science and the safety." See page 5 for more.

Polio killings

Two polio-vaccination workers were killed by a roadside bomb on 31 January in northwestern Pakistan, and a policeman guarding immunization teams was killed two days earlier in another part of the country. The violence follows a series of deadly attacks on health workers during a December

campaign to help eradicate polio (see *Nature* 493, 8; 2013), which had to be partly suspended. It is not clear whether the latest roadside bombing was intended to target health workers.

HPV vaccination

An international cooperation of public and private entities will fund the immunization of 180,000 girls in eight developing countries against human papillomavirus (HPV), the cause of most cervical cancers. The GAVI Alliance, based in Geneva, Switzerland, announced on 4 February that it would roll out the programme in Laos and seven African countries — Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Niger, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Madagascar. It plans to expand the initiative to more than 20 countries and

1 million girls by 2015. See go.nature.com/zplabr for more.

BUSINESS

Antisense success

The US Food and Drug Administration has approved an anti-cholesterol drug based on antisense technology, which uses synthetic DNA to inhibit messenger RNA and 'silence' target genes. The drug, Kynamro (mipomersen), which prevents production of a protein involved in carrying cholesterol, was approved on 29 January and will be used only to treat patients with a severe form of familial hypercholesterolaemia, a rare condition that causes very high levels of blood cholesterol. Kynamro was developed by Isis Pharmaceuticals of Carlsbad,

California. It will be the only antisense drug on the market at present. See go.nature.com/aieoww for more.

Pfizer split

On 1 February, pharmaceutical giant Pfizer spun out its animal-health business Zoetis in an initial public offering valued at US\$2.24 billion. Zoetis, headquartered in Madison, New Jersey, earned \$4.2 billion in fiscal year 2011. The spin-off is part of Pfizer's plan to pare down its business: in November, the New York-based company sold off its nutrition business to the Swiss food firm Nestlé for \$11.85 billion. Pfizer will continue to own about 80% of Zoetis stock.

FACILITIES

US collider fate

The only remaining particle collider in the United States has been flagged for possible closure. The Nuclear Science Advisory committee voted on 29 January to designate the Relativistic Heavy Ion Collider (RHIC) at Brookhaven National Laboratory in Upton, New York, as the most likely of three facilities to be closed if nuclear-science budgets remain flat. The RHIC produces multi-million-degree plasmas of quarks and gluons that are now also being studied at Europe's Large

Hadron Collider at CERN, near Geneva. See go.nature.com/oliczf for more.

PEOPLE

Bulgaria scandal

Bulgaria's science and education minister, Sergei Ignatov, was fired on 28 January after a government inquiry confirmed that he had been responsible for mismanagement of research money. Stefan Vodenicharov, the current president of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, has been nominated to replace him. Last November, scientists accused the Bulgarian Science Fund, which is overseen by the science ministry, of funneling competitive grants towards poor-quality projects proposed by researchers with close ties to the fund (see *Nature* 491, 649; 2012). The fund's two top officials, Rangel Gjurov and Hristo Petrov, both resigned from their leadership positions last week. See go.nature.com/ftdgvw for more.

Chu to step down

Steven Chu (pictured) announced on 1 February that he will soon step down as head of the US Department of Energy (DOE), a move that had been widely anticipated. In a letter to DOE employees, Chu highlighted a string of accomplishments, including



starting the Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy, founding five Energy Innovation Hubs for applied research and overseeing a doubling in the country's production of solar and wind energy. See go.nature.com/dafanx for more.

RESEARCH

Satellite success

South Korea put a satellite into orbit on 30 January — the country's first successful attempt from its own soil. The launch, from the Naro Space Center, at the southern end of the peninsula, came seven weeks after rival North Korea launched its first satellite into orbit. South Korea's rocket was built in partnership with Russia, and had failed on attempts in 2009 and 2010. The country plans to develop its own rocket by 2018. See go.nature.com/frn39p for more.

COMING UP

10 FEBRUARY

The Large Hadron Collider shuts down for almost two years of upgrades. See page 16 for more.

11 FEBRUARY

NASA launches its eighth Landsat satellite to take images of Earth. See page 13 for more.

No NIH racial bias

A study has challenged the idea that grant-making at the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) is biased against black researchers, a major concern for the agency since a 2011 report made that claim (D. K. Ginther *et al. Science* 333, 1015–1019; 2011). The latest analysis, published on 31 January (J. Yang *et al. J. Informetrics* 7, 318–324; 2013), found that black faculty members actually performed similarly, if not better than, their white counterparts with similar productivity levels in both total NIH funding and in number of NIH-funded projects. See go.nature.com/klekyb for more.

TB vaccine blow

A leading candidate for a sorely needed new vaccine against tuberculosis (TB) has failed to protect children against the disease in a major clinical trial. The results of the MVA85A vaccine trial in South Africa, published in *The Lancet*, show that it seems to have “no significant efficacy” against tuberculosis. The results are a major blow to the TB research community; MVA85A could have served as a booster to the ‘BCG’ vaccine, which is used worldwide against the disease but has patchy efficacy. See go.nature.com/9ppuob for more.

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TREND WATCH

Prices for allowances to emit a tonne of carbon dioxide on Europe's carbon-trading market are still in free fall. The cause is a slump in industrial activity which means that the region's emissions are now far below the cap set by politicians, leaving the market awash in unneeded allowances. Thomson Reuters Point Carbon, a consultancy firm in Oslo, estimates an oversupply of about 2 billion tonnes of carbon allowances up to 2020 (equivalent to one year's emissions from all the polluters in the scheme).

EUROPE'S CARBON PRICE PLUNGES

Carbon prices in the European Union's emissions-trading scheme have fallen sharply since the start of 2013.

