

## Seven days: 11–17 November 2011

**The week in science: Geron stops clinical trials with human embryonic stem cells; NSF starts high-risk grants programme; and disgraced psychologist Stapel returns his PhD.**

16 November 2011

Policy | Research | People | Business | Events | Trend Watch | Coming up

### POLICY

**AIDS-free goal** Achieving a generation worldwide without AIDS is now a policy priority for the United States, because it has become a feasible goal, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced on 8 November at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland. The goal could be reached by combining three proven strategies, she said: prevent mother-to-child transmission, increase adult male circumcision rates, and scale up anti-retroviral treatment for people with HIV/AIDS. See [go.nature.com/fdd1f4](http://go.nature.com/fdd1f4) for more.

**Personhood falters** Voters in Mississippi have rejected a state constitutional amendment to redefine 'person' as "every human being from the moment of fertilization, cloning, or the equivalent thereof". Had the initiative passed on 8 November, it would have outlawed abortion in the socially conservative state and could have restricted the use of reproductive technology and certain contraceptives. The amendment earned 42% of the vote — a significant increase over the 27% and 29% achieved by previous attempts to pass similar amendments in Colorado. The 'personhood' movement is set to try its luck in elections in several other states in 2012 (see *Nature* **479**, 13–14; 2011).

**Red List reptiles** Tarzan's chameleon (*Calumma tarzan*, pictured), was discovered only last year in forests in Madagascar, but it has almost immediately been classed as critically endangered, following its assessment for the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List. The lizard, which is fast losing habitat because of slash-and-burn agriculture and logging, joins 21 other Madagascan reptile species in the critically endangered category. See Editorial, page 268 for more on this year's Red List



J. Köhler

**Polar-bear concern** Canada's environment ministry has declared the polar bear to be a “species of special concern”. The 10 November decision means that a management plan to protect the species must be produced within three years. Around two-thirds of the world's polar bears live in Canada. The Center for Biological Diversity, an environmental campaign group based in Tucson, Arizona, complained that the bear should have been listed as 'threatened' or 'endangered', which would have prohibited some types of hunting and established a protected 'critical habitat'.

**Nuclear Iran** Iran has pursued work related to the development of a nuclear weapon, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said in a report released on 8 November. The assessment marks a significant departure from the agency's previous reports, which have previously criticized Iran for hiding nuclear facilities. See page 282 for more.

**Pipeline postponed** The US government has delayed a key decision on whether to approve a 2,700-kilometre pipeline to carry oil from tar sands in Alberta, Canada, to the coast of Texas. On 10 November, the state department said that it needed to explore alternative routes through Nebraska for the Keystone XL pipeline, after protests from landowners in the state and from environmental groups who oppose the use of tar-sands oil. The delay means that there can be no decision on the project until after the 2012 elections in the United States.

## RESEARCH

**NSF goes boldly** In an effort to encourage “bold” interdisciplinary research, the US National Science Foundation (NSF) is starting a grants programme that will skip the agency's normal process of external peer review. The programme, named Creative Research Awards for Transformative Interdisciplinary Ventures (CREATIV), will accept only high-risk proposals that cross traditional research disciplines. Requests can be for up to US\$1 million over a period of up to five years, and will be subject only to internal review from the NSF.

## PEOPLE

**RNA pioneer dies** Har Gobind Khorana, the biochemist who rose from humble origins in rural India to win the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1968, died on 9 November aged 89. He won the prize while working at the university, for discovering how RNA codes for the synthesis of proteins. Khorana shared the award with Robert Holley and Marshall Nirenberg.

**Stapel returns PhD** Diederik Stapel (pictured), the prominent Dutch psychologist who was found to have faked data in at least 30 research papers, has voluntarily surrendered the PhD he earned from the University of Amsterdam in 1997, the university announced on 10 November. Stapel declared in a statement that his recent behaviour did not befit the holder of a doctorate. A 31 October report revealing Stapel's misconduct (see *Nature* **479**, 15; 2011) said it was impossible to determine if his PhD was fraudulent, and recommended that the university investigate whether the degree could be withdrawn on grounds of unworthy conduct.



*Persbureau van Eindhoven*

Diederik Stapel

**Turkish revolt** Almost half of the members of the Turkish Academy of Sciences resigned last week, protesting against government decrees that threatened the academy's autonomy. By 11 November, 64 members (46%) had resigned, after a 4 November statute did not significantly soften a 27 August decree that gave the government power to appoint the president and most members of the academy, and enabled it to nominate top personnel in research-funding agency TÜBİTAK.

**DOE departure** Steven Koonin, the undersecretary for science at the US Department of Energy, is leaving the agency after two and a half years. The department's head, Steven Chu, told employees on 8 November that Koonin would leave on 18 November to join the Science and Technology Policy Institute in Washington DC. Koonin, previously chief scientist at energy firm BP and provost of the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, was one of Chu's highest-profile appointments. See [go.nature.com/ktaxby](http://go.nature.com/ktaxby) for more.

## **BUSINESS**

**Depression setback** Shares in US biotechnology firm Targacept of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, plunged by more than 50% after it announced on 8 November that an experimental antidepressant drug had failed in the first of four late-stage clinical trials. The drug, TC-5214, is the first in a new class of depression treatments that work on the brain's nicotine receptors. See page 278 for more.

**Stem-cell departure** Geron, the first company to gain US approval for a clinical trial using human embryonic stem cells, is to walk away from the scientific field that it helped to create. The firm, based in Menlo Park, California, said on 14 November that it will stop its stem-cell programme and instead focus on cancer therapies. Among the casualties is Geron's landmark stem-cell treatment for spinal cord injuries. See [go.nature.com/n6bbyu](http://go.nature.com/n6bbyu) for more.

## EVENTS

**Soyuz success** A Soyuz rocket successfully launched from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan this week carrying three astronauts to the International Space Station (ISS). Anton Shkaplerov, Anatoly Ivanishin and Dan Burbank were the first people to fly on a Soyuz since a cargo craft atop a Soyuz-U rocket crashed in August. If the 13 November launch had not gone ahead, the ISS might have had to be left temporarily uncrewed, as the three astronauts now in residence are due to leave the station on 21 November.

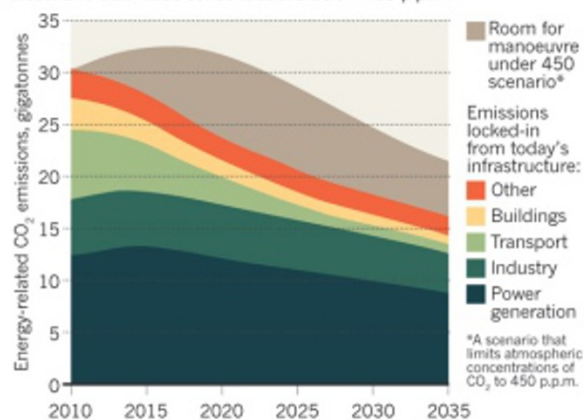
**Mars no go** As *Nature* went to press, the Russian space agency Roscosmos had been unable to re-establish contact with its Phobos-Grunt probe. The soil-return mission was launched on 9 November, but became stuck in an Earth orbit. See page 275 for more.

## TREND WATCH

If significant policy action is not taken, it will be impossible to hold atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations below 450 parts per million, the target thought to give an even chance of limiting global warming to 2 °C. According to *World Energy Outlook 2011*, released on 9 November by the International Energy Agency, assuming no new policies are implemented, new infrastructure to satiate the world's energy needs will mean that exceeding the target level cannot be avoided after 2017.

### APPROACHING A CARBON LIMIT

Existing infrastructure will emit 80% of the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions allowed by a scenario that holds concentrations below 450 p.p.m.



Source: IEA

## COMING UP

### 17–19 November

The fifth biennial World Science Forum in Budapest discusses 'The Changing Landscape of Science'.

[www.sciforum.hu](http://www.sciforum.hu)

### 23 November

A US bipartisan congressional committee reaches its deadline for finding ways to cut at least US\$1.2 trillion from the country's deficit over the next ten years. Its formulae will be keenly watched by science lobbyists.

*Nature* **479**, 272–273 (17 November 2011) doi:10.1038/479272a