

The key to improving health in Apartadó lies with basic public health measures—clean water, a sewerage system, a

more stable social order, a more complete vaccination program, and better malaria control. Ironically, the availability of drugs

seems to have fostered apathy about basic preventive measures, such as draining swamps, observing careful personal hy-

## Briefing

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### Claim to Spanish Treasure Ship Disputed

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The Department of the Interior last week filed suit disputing the finder's claim to the wreck of the *Nuestra Señora de la Atocha*, probably one of the richest Spanish treasure ships to have gone down off the coast of Florida.

The government hopes that the action will constitute a test case enabling all shipwreck sites outside the 3-mile limit to be brought under the jurisdiction of the Antiquities Act. This would ban private salvors and allow the wrecks to be recovered only by universities and those interested in the archeological value alone.

The *Atocha* lies 11 miles off the Marquesas islands at the western end of the Florida Keys. The site was claimed by the state of Florida until March of this year, when the U.S. Supreme Court, in a suit brought by oil companies, cut the state's claims back to the 3-mile limit.

The finder of the shipwreck, Melvin A. Fisher, then filed suit to establish his claim in federal law. It is this claim the Department of the Interior disputes.

The department's aim of protecting the nation's archeological heritage is doubtless admirable in intent. In this particular case, however, it happens that Fisher has spent 7 years and invested more than \$700,000 in searching for the *Atocha* (*Science*, 8 November 1974). He has on his payroll a professional archeologist, Duncan Mathewson, who is satisfied that most archeological information is being saved, certainly as much as can reasonably be expected in a commercial operation. This July a salvage ship sank near the site, drowning a diver and Fisher's son and daughter-in-law. The government's move to claim the wreck comes at a time when the main treasure deposit seems finally to have come within Fisher's reach.

Asked if it didn't seem unfair to snatch the wreck from Fisher and his team so late in the game, an Interior Department attorney said, "I guess perhaps it does—that is why we have not kicked him right off the site, which we feel we have the authority to do."

The government, however, has not yet decided on what legal basis to challenge Fisher's claims. The Justice Department attorney who is handling the case for Interior says it is not certain whether he will cite the Antiquities Act—"We have to hustle around and see if we can find enough law to get our guys in." Fisher's attorneys argue that the Antiquities Act does not cover waters beyond the 3-mile limit, and that the international law governing nations' rights in their outer continental shelf was explicitly held by its framers to exclude shipwrecks.

At stake is a treasure of fabulous proportions. The *Atocha's* manifest, completed in Havana a few days before she sank on 5 September 1622, lists 40.7 troy tons of gold and silver objects. The Spaniards failed to recover any of the ship's cargo, if the reports of their several salvage expeditions are to be believed.—N.W.

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### Science Adviser Bill Moves Forward in Congress

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Congress has considered a plethora of proposals for reorganizing science in government, especially in the White House, ever since former President Richard Nixon banished the science adviser and his staff from that coveted location in 1973. Previous bills have stood, at best, an outside chance of ever becoming law; but Congress now seems ready to pass a bill in the next month which the President will be only too happy to sign.

The House Committee on Science and Technology is reworking a draft of a bill it wrote on the basis of a barebones one sent by the White House to Congress earlier in the year. The bill follows the 70-word White House proposal in calling for a single science adviser who, unlike his predecessors, would be subject to Senate confirmation. He would also have a say in national security matters.

To worry over the broader question of federal organization of science, a presidential study group would be set up to work with the new science advis-

er; it would report to the new Administration sometime in 1977.

A final bill probably will be marked up by the full committee in early October and passed promptly by the House, staffers say. But this schedule could slip because the committee's chairman and the bill's chief sponsor, Olin E. Teague (D-Tex.), suffered a stroke last July and has been forced to limit his congressional activities.

On the Senate side the prognosis is complicated by the fact that three separate committees have jurisdiction over the Administration's proposal. Moreover it is in the Senate that the most extravagant proposals for reorganizing federal science have cropped up. However, the three key senators involved, Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.), Frank Moss (D-Utah), and Warren G. Magnuson (D-Wash.), all publicly favor returning a science adviser to the White House; hence, they seem prepared to pass a bill which meets the Administration's wishes as soon as possible.—D.S.

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### Guerillas Throw Monkey Wrench into Chimp Research

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Primatologist Jane Goodall has had to curtail field observations in Tanzania since the kidnapping of four of her white student assistants last May by guerillas from Zaire, reports the *Times Higher Education Supplement (THES)* of London. The victims were snatched up from the Gombe Stream Research Centre on Lake Tanzania, where they were keeping tabs on chimps, baboons, and red colobus monkeys. Now, because of the danger, only a small team of five African researchers remains at the station. Important continuity is being lost, as some of the individual chimps had been under observation for up to 10 years, according to the *THES*.

Goodall, a professor of human biology, continues to divide her time between Dar es Salaam (Tanzania's capital) and Stanford University, from whence came three of the kidnappees. All four were eventually released.

—C.H.