

Letters

Duesberg's PNAS Paper

I must clarify several points that were made in William Booth's News & Comment article of 10 February (p. 733) about the special editorial process accorded my recent paper in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (PNAS) on the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and AIDS (1). Clearly, I am very happy to see that *Science* has finally begun to pay attention to my case against HIV as the cause of AIDS. However, getting "a lot of ink" from pens like Booth's is a mixed blessing. It would have been better to get more ink for the impact of my arguments regarding the etiology of AIDS than for how dissenting minorities are discouraged by the current establishment. This whole incident shows how hard it is to get "ink" for the substance of a very debatable scientific issue, even in a noncommercial journal like PNAS.

In addition, the implication that some or many of the points made in my paper were published because PNAS editor Igor Dawid "lost just a touch of his fighting spirit" is unjustified. Although the reviewers held the opinion that these points were "somewhat misleading or incomplete," they did not provide a single literature citation or set of data to support their lengthy assertions based on currently popular assumptions. Dawid was himself kind enough to request such documentation, but he received no more than two vintage references (one from 1970, the other from 1977) that are now part of my final manuscript. It is for this reason that Dawid accepted my points as "legalistically correct." I believe that in a scientific paper it is "legalistically correct" to argue with documented facts, rather than assumptions, no matter how popular.

In addition, Booth presents Dawid's comment, "if you wish to make these unsupported, vague and prejudicial statements . . ." in a misleading context. This statement was limited to the discussion in an earlier draft of my paper of the apparently paradoxical distribution of HIV in the United States (>90% male). It was not applied to my paper as a whole. In the draft that was accepted by Dawid, this and all other critical points raised by the reviewers had been answered to his satisfaction.

Finally, I should correct the statement that "2000 articles printed in the *Proceedings* each year slip by without anonymous and rigorous peer review." Instead, the majority of those papers, namely all those from nonmembers, are subjected to two or more such

anonymous reviews. Even those contributed by members are read by at least one "knowledgeable colleague" (mine was read by two before being subjected to special scrutiny).

PETER DUESBERG

Department of Molecular Biology,
University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720

REFERENCES

1. P. Duesberg, *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A.* **86**, 755 (1989).

Proposition 65

Leslie Roberts' article about California's Proposition 65 (News & Comment, 20 Jan., p. 306) correctly notes that industry scare tactics about the new law are wearing thin. However, Bruce Ames is quoted to the effect that Proposition 65 regulates carcinogens at "incredibly low" levels. In fact, those levels are currently *higher*, not lower, than what the Environmental Protection Agency and the Food and Drug Administration, among others, have repeatedly pronounced for known carcinogens over the past 20 years of toxic chemical regulation.

Roberts also reports the industry campaign to have Proposition 65 erased by White House fiat, in the closing days of the Reagan Administration. Readers might be interested to know that the campaign failed, in part because an official White House study group concluded that industry's claims of harm were "vastly overstate[d]" and that the law's likeliest costs to producers would be "of the nature of product testing and quality control expenditures."

ELLEN SILBERGELD

DAVID ROE

Environmental Defense Fund,
1616 P Street, NW,
Washington, DC 20036

Tax on the Six-Cylinder Car

Daniel E. Koshland, Jr. (Editorial, 20 Jan., p. 281), proposes a proportional or progressive tax on automobiles on the basis of their fuel consumption. The benefits he lists are numerous: smaller deficits in the federal budget and foreign aid, cleaner air, and better care of the needy (this last a fine example of double-counting).

The same argument calls for progressive taxation of dwelling units: they too use fuel; and, to paraphrase Koshland on automobiles, most rooms in larger homes have less than one occupant. He appropriately remarks that if this kind of policy becomes widely accepted, it could be extended to

other areas (room temperatures? illumination? travel?).

Koshland's editorial presents by example his distinction between "national policy" and "personal peccadillo." Could he have confused the two?

GEORGE J. STIGLER

Center for the Study of the
Economy and the State,
University of Chicago,
Chicago, IL 60637

Koshland does not mention the fact that small cars are markedly more dangerous than big cars and particularly more dangerous in an environment that still contains some older large cars.

There is, however, another much more significant objection to the tax he proposes, assuming we are willing to change to more dangerous cars in order to save gasoline. After all, the car danger could be eliminated by lower speed limits, better enforcement of traffic regulations, and so on, but we would have taxed the wrong thing. We should be taxing the gasoline, not the car. The owner of the large car who drives very little is contributing less to pollution than the owner of a small car who drives a great deal.

Finally, Koshland denies that the tax on cars would be "regressive." Unfortunately either a tax on six-cylinder cars or a tax on gasoline is regressive. The poor tend to own older cars that are larger and less economical than the small new cars that are owned by the upper-income groups. Therefore, the poor pay more of either of these taxes.

GORDON TULLOCK

Department of Economics,
College of Business and Public Administration,
University of Arizona,
Tucson, AZ 85721

I experienced a definite déjà vu reading Koshland's editorial "A tax on sin: The six-cylinder car." What Koshland proposes is virtually identical to the vehicle tax plans long in existence in many of the Western European—and other—nations. In fact, his arguments closely parallel those made at the time the European levies were imposed.

One of the underlying reasons why European automobiles have traditionally been smaller, with smaller power plants, than those in the United States, may be traced directly to the registration tax approach in those nations. Briefly, the long-held European theory has been that the automobile is a luxury and should be taxed as such. The reasoning then was that the best measure of the "degree" of such luxury lay in the size (power) of the engine. Thus it followed that a steeply graduated levy on the displacement of the vehicle's power plant was the simplest

and most equitable means of extracting a sumptuary tax on a vehicle.

Over the decades, this has had several benefits insofar as resource allocations and public funds committed to highways are concerned. First, it placed a premium on power-plant efficiency, thus reducing the use of fuels and the accompanying pollution and depletion of resources. Second, it placed a premium on lightweight vehicle components—in order to achieve acceptable performance levels—again conserving such resources as steel and aluminum. Finally the resulting small, light, and agile automobiles permitted the construction of highways less massive and costly than those encountered in this country.

Today, some of the original users of displacement-based licensing fees have abandoned the practice as an “efficiency” measure. Almost simultaneously, engine outputs per cubic centimeter have begun growing—with the advent of higher compressions, turbo charging and the like.

Annual federal and/or state licensing taxes based on engine displacement would—to day in the United States—definitely have a positive impact on resource uses in a number of fields. Rather than a sin tax, this approach might best be labeled an efficiency-reward levy. If family-type autos can achieve some 35 to 40 miles per gallon in Europe and elsewhere, why not here also?

RICHARD A. STALEY
R. A. Staley Consulting,
1221 South Buchanan Street,
Arlington, VA 22204

Animal Research and Government Policy

Constance Holden, in her News and Comment article “Universities fight animal activists” (6 Jan., p. 17), points out that the National Institutes of Health have “so far kept a low profile on the research animal issue.” This applies to the Public Health Service (PHS) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as well. Over the past 3 years I have asked both Charles E. Koop, Surgeon General, and Robert E. Windom, Assistant Secretary of HHS, to consider making an executive policy statement for distribution to the general public. I have had little response.

It should be explicitly stated that animal research is necessary to accomplish the mission of the PHS, generally understood to be the betterment of the nation’s health. The fact that the PHS currently funds most of the health-related animal research in this country implies the government’s policy on

the matter. It is time that a firm and clear executive statement is made on the subject. This would be of great aid to those of us who have to deal with the antivivisectionists’ actions and arguments every day. Statements by the Surgeon General on health hazards (for example, smoking) have proved to be very effective. The goal of the antivivisectionists, abolition of animal research, if achieved, would pose a major problem to the health of future generations. The public should be so informed.

GLENN A. LANGER
Office of the Dean,
UCLA School of Medicine,
Center for the Health Sciences,
University of California,
Los Angeles, CA 90024-1722

Incentives for Energy Conservation

Mark Crawford’s article “Electricity crunch foreseen . . . maybe” (News & Comment, 18 Nov., p. 1005) is an excellent summary of the dilemma and uncertainties faced by electric utility managers. My company, Wisconsin Electric Power, is one of the leading utilities in the development and application of least-cost planning, including an aggressive program to manage both energy and peak loads. In the last 2 years, we have spent about \$70 million to help our customers reduce peak demand—residential by 47 megawatts and commercial-industrial by 62 megawatts. Because of actions that might have been taken without our program (called “free riders” in least-cost planning terminology), we estimate the net impact on our system to be about 70 to 80 megawatts, or nearly 2% of our nearly 5000-megawatts peak load. Moreover, we are continuing the program for the foreseeable future—refined, based on our experience, to be even more cost-effective.

Crawford’s article makes much of the issue of the disincentives such programs have for utilities. That need not be the case. Disincentives can be remedied easily by regulators. An example is the action of our own Wisconsin Public Service Commission providing for an incentive bonus on our return for reaching energy management targets. Were there no other benefit, this would spur us to effective use energy management expenditures. But, there is more. All utility managers I know want to hold down rates to enhance their own competitive position and to help assure a viable economic climate in their service territory. Efficiently designed energy management programs do just that.

Another comment I must make is that one needs to accept figures from the “gurus” of

conservation with a grain of salt. For example, Amory Lovins’ statement quoted in the article that conservation can bring about a potential savings equivalent to 500 plants of 1000-megawatt size is an exaggeration. But, even if the real potential is only 1/10 of that (I believe this is a more reasonable estimate), the benefit in reduced costs is well worthwhile for utilities and others to strive to achieve.

RENÉ H. MALÈS
Wisconsin Electric Power Company,
231 West Michigan,
Post Office Box 2046,
Milwaukee, WI 53201

Language Dispute

In Roger Lewin’s article on the “American Indian language dispute” (Research News, 23 Dec., p. 1632), I am quoted as saying that “sound correspondences have come to epitomize what is good about contemporary historical linguistics.” I would like to clarify that this was said in reference to *other* scholars’ views, discussed in the article, which I do not share. As is clear from the discussion of this “dispute” in my recent book on language classification (1), I am firmly on Joseph Greenberg’s side. Moreover, the lack of “regular sound correspondences” was one of the major objections to Greenberg’s classification of African languages some 40 years ago, a classification now universally accepted by Africanists. Furthermore, it is incorrect to say that Greenberg’s methodology is “not generally favored among linguists.” It is not favored by many Amerindian scholars, but within *general* linguistics it is the only method that has ever produced any substantive results, from the discovery of Indo-European to the classification of African and American languages. What is perhaps most curious about this dispute is that the Amerind family, which is almost universally rejected by experts, is better supported than any of the four African families, which are all accepted as valid.

MERRITT RUHLEN
4335 Cesano Court,
Palo Alto, CA 94306

REFERENCES

1. M. Ruhlen, *A Guide to the World’s Languages*, vol. 1, *Classification* (Stanford Univ. Press, Stanford, CA, 1987).

Erratum: In the report “Synthetic CD4 peptide derivatives that inhibit HIV infection and cytopathicity” by Jeffrey D. Lifson *et al.* (5 Aug., p. 712), the last seven residues of the CD4 peptide (26–50) should have been SFLTKGP rather than STLTKGP.