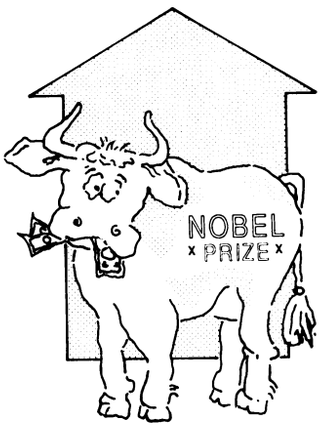
Random Samples:



Market Is Bullish for Nobel Prize

The value of becoming a Nobel laureate just went up. The Nobel Foundation has raised the cash award for the Nobel prizes by 20% to $473,000, and is hoping eventually to boost the amount even higher.

Foundation executive director Stig Ramel said the increase is due to another record-breaking year in profits for the foundation, which invests its capital in the stock market. Profits last year rose 71% to $9.1 million, Ramel said. The market value of invested capital rose to $238 million, up from $205 million in 1987.

Last year the prizes were increased by 15% to $416,000. But even after 2 years of sizable growth, Ramel says, the value of the prize still falls short, in real terms, of the first cash prize in 1901—in today's dollars, $630,000 to $788,000.

Would Alfred Nobel have approved? His will specified that assets be invested in safe, fixed-income bonds. But in 1953 the foundation began playing the market when inflation reduced the value of its capital by two-thirds.

A Modest Proposal

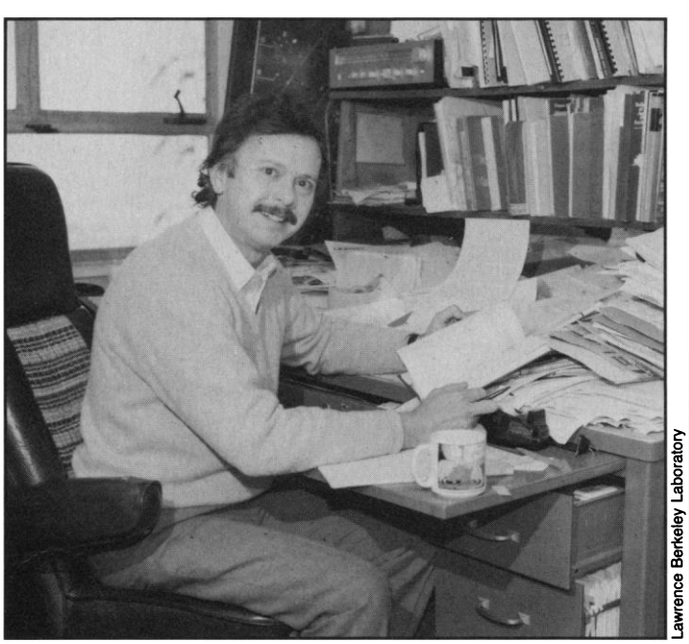
Can the National Science Foundation come up with a better set of procedures for spending its money? Try this. Ask all the U.S. scientists for their list of the best working scientists. Then ask the members of that list for *their* lists of the best. Repeat once again. Then, take the 1000 top scientists from the final list and give each $1 million a year to spend on any kind of research he or she desires.

That's the advice physicist Richard A. Muller gave Congress recently during hearings on the future direction of science and technology policy. Money spent in this fashion would be "far more productive in producing innovation than by doling it out for proposals that achieved the consensus of their 'peers,' " Muller said. (But under his plan, half the annual NSF budget would still be reserved for the peer-reviewed awards, Muller said.)

Muller, a distinguished scientist most recently in the news for his co-discovery of a pulsar in supernova 1987A (*Science*, 17 February, p. 892), is no newcomer to NSF. In 1978 he won the foundation's prestigious Waterman award, at which time he was cited for three research programs, all of which had been turned down by NSF.

The problem, Muller says, is that NSF is set up to support only ongoing, mainstream research projects and can't identify, much less support, forefront research.

The University of California, Berkeley, scientist repeatedly told the panel of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology that he was no politician. And then he proved it. He told the representatives that Congress shouldn't play much of a part in deciding on which "big science" projects should be done. "The unhappy message I have to convey is that I do not believe that Congress can play an important role"—words not likely to endear him to decision-makers on the Hill.



Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory

Richard A. Muller. *Drawing up his list of the best and brightest?*

"[I've] done a lot in the field of MVM Parvo Virus. And then at night I like to curl up with a book on mapping mutants. And every once in a while, when I have some spare time, Barbara and I read aloud about the behavior of the inhibitions of sialidases. But I'll tell you, I'm glad there's no quiz."

—President George Bush, in comments at the National Academy of Sciences building in Washington, D.C., after he inspected exhibits by the winners of the Westinghouse Science Talent Search on 3 March.

Save the "Data"!

Marcia Neugebauer, editor-in-chief of *Reviews of Geophysics* has mounted a campaign to save the "data."

Writing in the 28 February issue of *Eos*, published by the American Geophysical Union, she complains that computer modelers have stolen the word "data" from the experimentalists. "They should give it back and go find or invent their own word," she asserts.

"Datum," Neugebauer says, in Latin means "something that is given," which limits its use to observational information. Indeed, she reports, Webster's dictionary defines datum as "something that is given either from being experimentally encountered or from being admitted or assumed for specific purposes." The result of computer modeling may be "produced, computed, calculated, generated, approximated, created, made, built, constructed, or composed, but it is not given," she writes.

Instead of using data or datum, Neugebauer suggests computer modelers consider the neologisms "moprods," "moducts," or "modouts." Or perhaps "simprods" or "simputs," all of which draw on root words like "model," "simulation," and "products." Neugebauer says she's open to suggestions. ■ GREGORY BYRNE