

## Briefings

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### Byrd Reins in "Pork Barrel Lobbyists"

Business may never be the same for firms such as Washington-based Cassidy & Associates, which has a reputation for convincing congressional appropriations committees to fund university research projects that have not undergone stiff peer review.

Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV), chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, wants to slap \$100,000 fines on universities and other institutions that directly or indirectly use federal funds to pay such lobbyists.

Byrd reportedly is concerned that institutions that receive state and federal research dollars are using some of these funds to pay firms to lobby Uncle Sam for even more money. He moved to curtail this brand of lobbying after learning that the University of West Virginia had retained Cassidy & Associates to lobby federal agencies in its behalf.

Byrd attached an amendment to the Interior appropriations bill, which was approved, that calls for all universities to file reports every 6 months demonstrating that funds used to pay outside lobbyists are not federal dollars. Says Byrd, "the taxpayer should not have to pick up the check."

### Cambridge Profs Piqued at Merit Pay

Although professors at many British universities have been complaining loudly over their low salaries, a group at the University of Cambridge is willing to forego a raise.

The government plans to introduce merit awards that could increase their pay by up to \$13,000 a year. The reason: to improve teaching and stem the brain drain to the United

States. According to a study by the Royal Society, Britain's equivalent to the National Academy of Sciences, the proportion of fellows living abroad at the time of election has risen to one-third, compared with 12% in 1960.

But 35 university professors, including Nobel prizewinning physicist Brian Josephson, have signed a letter saying they will refuse to be considered for such awards. They'd rather lose a few pounds than increase tensions among professional colleagues.

Says statistician David Williams, "Ideas that might work in industry do not necessarily work in the academic community." Classics professor Anthony Snodgrass is even more critical, describing the plan as a "squalid exaltation of human greed into not merely a motive force, but a virtue."

### Congress Caps Grant Overhead Charge

Researchers may love it, but their institutions are howling. The U.S. Department of Agriculture is preparing to set a cap on overhead charges levied on its competitive grants. The new limit—a 25% ceiling on the amount of money institutions rake off from researchers' hard-won awards—takes effect this fall. The ceiling imposed by both the Senate and House appropriation committees conceivably could be overturned next month when Congress reconvenes, but that is not likely.

The measure was sponsored in the House by the chairman of the Appropriations Committee, Representative Jamie Whitten (D-MS), and in the Senate by Quentin N. Burdick (D-ND). The two were alarmed

about overhead charges that gobble as much as 77% of a grant.

Their solution has officials of major research universities upset, though. With USDA's competitive grants program totaling only \$40 million, they concede that the monetary loss to their institutions won't be catastrophic. But what has some university officials worried is that the cap on overhead charges "could be contagious." Were it to spread to the NSF, NIH, and other federal agencies, the financial health of some research institutions could be threatened.

### Utah Keeps the Faith

Those irrepressible folks in Utah: they just won't let cold fusion die. A nine-member panel created by the state recently voted 7 to 1 to release \$4.5 million to set up a cold fusion research institute at the University of Utah. Guess who voted against? A chemist—Karen Morse, who is provost at Utah State University. Wilford Hansen of the physics department at Utah State University was also on the panel and he abstained.

Was it just school rivalry that turned the two into skeptics, or were they in agreement with the preponderance of the scientific community? Hard to say, but all the yes votes came from non-scientists.

### CEQ Gets Director

Michael R. Deland, head of the New England office of the Environmental Protection Agency, has stepped in as director of the President's Council on Environmental Quality.

The three-member White House council languished to the point of invisibility during the Reagan Administration's 8-year reign. Environmentalists are said to welcome the choice but are not optimistic about the President's willingness to restore CEQ to its earlier stature.

### Statistics to Star on TV?

What is the probability of attracting a big audience to a 26-part public TV series on statistics? Mathematician Solomon Garfunkel is betting that he can beat the odds.

Beginning on 26 August, public television stations across the country will air the first of his bold half-hour efforts to dazzle viewers with the role of statistics in their everyday lives. Garfunkel's topics: such grade-school concepts as mean, mode, and median, along with the way statisticians examine correlations in data.

If all this sounds like a wonderful long shot, don't count out the Massachusetts-based executive director of the Consortium for Mathematics And Its Applications. Garfunkel's show will offer viewers college credit, and Garfunkel has had some practice with a previous award-winning PBS show on mathematics—"For All Practical Purposes: An Introduction to Mathematics." Perhaps this explains why the media-age mathematician was confident enough to name his new show "Against All Odds: An Introduction to Statistics."



Against all odds? Solomon Garfunkel aims to turn TV viewers on with statistics.