

Briefings

edited by CONSTANCE HOLDEN

Judd Leaves NIMH

Lewis Judd, director of the National Institute of Mental Health, has resigned as of 12 October and is returning to his post as chair of the psychiatry department at the University of California at San Diego. He has been on unpaid leave since coming to NIMH in January 1987.

Judd, a psychopharmacology researcher who has characterized himself as "the first NIMH director ever with a meaningful research career," is leaving now because UCSD told him he had to come back or relinquish the post. His government salary was about \$100,000 a year.

Judd has presided over NIMH during 3 years of rapid budgetary growth after a long period of relative stagnancy. He has "moved NIMH into the center of biomedical research," says his deputy, psychologist Alan Leshner, and has translated the institute's Decade of the Brain—spearheaded by his predecessor Shervert Frazier—from a "general notion" into a series of specific neuroscience research initiatives. But in a letter to colleagues he said the main reason is financial: "my family and I can no longer afford to remain in government service."

Leshner is now acting director of NIMH and a search is on for a permanent replacement. NIMH directors have traditionally been psychiatrists.



Lewis Judd

Spilled Oil Looks Worse on TV

First come the oil-laden birds, gasping their last on the evening news. Next the black-coated seals. Then the frantic cleanup, the battle against time to stave off ecological disaster. And finally the hefty bill.

But such Herculean efforts aren't usually worth it, says a recent report* from the Congressional Research Service. Author James Mielke notes that most cleanup efforts are doomed to failure—usually no more than 10 to 15% of a large spill is recovered. What's more, he writes, the remaining oil is hardly the disaster portrayed by the media.

Mielke reviews the effects of two drill platform blowouts and four tanker spills, excluding the recent *Exxon Valdez* and *Mega Borg* accidents still under study. Marine life may have been hit hard soon after these incidents, but "recovery of species populations in almost every case studied has been swift." He also reports that such spills as the Santa Barbara Channel blowout and the *Amoco Cadiz* tanker spill, while regarded by many as major catastrophes, produced environmental and socioeconomic consequences that were "relatively modest, and, as far as can be determined, of relatively short duration." Oil is a natural substance, notes the report, and given a bit of time, most spilled oil will evaporate, degrade biologically and chemically, and form relatively benign tar lumps.

*Oil in the ocean: The short- and long-term impacts of a spill," 90-356 SPR, available from CRS, Library of Congress.



Ecological canard? Do the visible victims of oil spills get too much attention?

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"It's devastating to have a spill," says Mielke, "but there's a lot of overreaction." As an example, he points to the record harvest of 40 million pink salmon, some of which were released from hatcheries after the spill, in Prince William Sound this year. Given that kind of recovery, the \$2-billion Alaska cleanup "is money that could have been better spent," he says.

Researchers contacted by *Science*, although reluctant to go on the record in this highly litigious field, tended to agree with Mielke's assessment. They did add the proviso that oil stuck in quiet coves and marshes can persist at toxic levels longer than in areas exposed to wind and wave. Still, they say, recovery begins in years, not decades.

Asian Admissions (Cont.)

Days after the Department of Education found anti-Asian discrimination in the UCLA graduate math program (*Science*, 12 October, p. 28), it gave Harvard University a clean bill of health following a compliance review of its undergraduate admissions policies.

The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) found that Asian Americans—who make up 19.6% of Harvard's freshman class this year—are admitted at a lower rate than white applicants. But it saw no "pretext for discrimination," ascribing the difference instead to preferences given children of alumni and athletes.

The OCR is still busy reviewing UCLA's undergraduate admissions policies; in addition, in July it started a compliance review of Asian admissions to UC

Berkeley's law school.

The OCR plans to unveil a new "enforcement strategy" on civil rights in higher education at the end of October.

A Shakeout in R&D?

Cries of alarm over a coming shortage of scientists and engineers are off the mark, says Robert White, president of the National Academy of Engineering. The real problem, he says, is a shortage of funds for research, and that's something that is here to stay.

"We have a crisis of rising expectations that will not be met," White told the annual meeting of the NAE last month in Washington, D.C. "The R&D enterprise is going through a shakeout not unlike that in an industry when there are too many players for the size of the market." Quoting Erich Bloch, former director of

the National Science Foundation, White said, "The awful truth is that no scientific discipline will ever again be fully funded."

What to do? White proposes an increased emphasis on funding "critical and generic civil technologies." This will help offset what he sees as "a fundamental mismatch between what the nation needs from the research and development enterprise and what the science and engineering community wants." And to make more effective use of limited R&D funding, White suggests a system of institutional grants similar to the Independent Research and Development funds given by the Department of Defense to companies engaged in promising fields of research. That might diminish some of the interdiscipline squabbling and pork barrel politics that are rife in the current system, he says.