

"This [PR campaign] is forging new policy at Penn State for protecting important results." In my statement, "this" referred only to the manner in which we had employed the services of lawyers outside the university and had nothing to do with a "PR campaign." Since making that statement, I have learned this is not new policy and that outside lawyers have been used in other similar situations at Penn State.

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Response: True, Roy's manuscript arrived in the offices of *Science* and *Nature* before he held his press conference, but only several hours before the press conference. There simply is no way that he genuinely put the work "on record before our [his] 'peers,'" as he states, before putting it before the press.

Messier's comment again raises the question, What was the point of the news conference? At the least, it was a highly unusual means of communicating science that effectively bypassed standard peer review and was okayed at the highest level of university administration. *Science* covered the press conference as a PR event. —**Ivan Amato**

Response: *Science*, like many other journals, releases papers at the same time to all news media (i) to help journalists, who will know that a paper has been peer-reviewed by experts in the field; (ii) to allow other scientists to see the actual data, so that they may assess any statements made about the paper; and (iii) to allow authors, knowing these procedures, to be more authoritative when they discuss their work.

Roy alleges that peer reviewers "leak" privileged information to those who can profit economically from it, but this editor knows of no cases when this has occurred in *Science*'s peer-reviewing process.

An author may believe that he or she has made an extremely important advance, but frequently peer reviewers disagree, so reporters attending a press conference could have difficulty evaluating questions about the novelty and importance of these new data in a timely manner.

Moreover, the idea that "everyone" gets the information at a press conference depends on who attends it, the accuracy of the information being distributed, and the circulation of the newspapers and magazines that report it. The accuracy of such information could degenerate rapidly and the number of reporters attending such conferences could decrease if authors were to scramble to get priority by publicity.

This editor does not accept the notion that a tried-and-true procedure for giving

the public accurate information and protecting authors' rights should be discarded on the basis of undocumented allegations that peer reviewers have violated ethical responsibilities.—**Daniel E. Koshland, Jr.**

AIDS Theories

It is not surprising that six scientists picked by the Wistar Institute to assess whether a polio vaccine made at Wistar and tested from 1957 to 1960 in Central Africa could have spawned the AIDS pandemic (1) stress the odds were against it (2) (Random Samples, 30 Oct., p. 738); however, the jury came in before inspection of the best evidence—old vaccine samples. Two theories posit that this vaccine might have been contaminated with a rare simian virus tantamount to the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV-1) (3).

Significantly, the committee urged a U.S. and worldwide shift away from manufacturing vaccines in primary monkey kidney cultures (2, pp. 7–8), a medium in which the presence of unknown and therefore undetectable infectious agents cannot be ruled out. Ronald Desrosiers of the Harvard Medical School and the New England Regional Primate Research Center, who wrote the final section of the Wistar report, has called vaccines made in monkey kidneys "a ticking time bomb" (4).

Finally, what *Science* terms the "putative coup de grâce" to the theory, the case of a British sailor said to have died of AIDS in 1959, does not necessarily debunk it. The seaman's health did not begin to fail, and his AIDS symptoms were not apparent, until December 1958 (5). By April 1958, more than 200,000 Central Africans had been vaccinated (6). Although rare, rapid deterioration and death after HIV-1 infection have been known to occur (7). The report says, without documentation, that the sailor returned to England before the vaccine testing began, but it does not address the possibility that a fellow sailor returning from Africa could have transmitted the virus to the sailor who died. Moreover, Wistar panel member David Ho has acknowledged (7) that, while the committee does not think this sailor's AIDS originated with the vaccine, it was not saying his case disproves that the Congo vaccine sparked the AIDS epidemic.

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Support for Pluto Mission

I would like to clarify some statements about Pluto mission planning at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in Eliot Marshall's article of 20 November (News & Comment, p. 1296).

There has been a growing push in the planetary community for a mission to Pluto for some years. In 1991, after a substantive NASA study (1) was made, a reconnaissance flyby mission was placed in the 1994–1997 new start planning queue by the scientific advisory board (SSAAC) to Lennard Fisk's Office of Space Science and Applications. The high ranking given to a Pluto mission was in part due to the widely recognized scientific relevance of the Pluto-Charon double planet system, which bears directly on our understanding of planetary origins, comparative planetology, and the potential for revealing physical processes not expressed elsewhere in the solar system (2).

As a result of these endorsements (3), the NASA Outer Planets Science Working Group (OPSWG) was charged with documenting and guiding the scientific content of Pluto mission studies. This group consists of more than 20 leading planetary scientists from around the nation and has been working with the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) since March 1991 to study a spectrum of Pluto mission architectures and implementations. Progress reports describing possible large and small missions were made to NASA's Solar System Exploration Subcommittee (SSES) in May 1991 and February 1992. In July 1992, OPSWG formally endorsed the small mission that Robert Staehle's JPL advanced studies team devised, finding it to be low cost, scientifically exciting, and technically competent. Indeed, this repeat mission has been placed at the top of OPSWG's priority queue for all outer solar system missions. Our specific recommendations were reviewed by the SSES in early December. A detailed description of the small-mission concept and its scientific content is also scheduled to be

presented to the National Academy of Sciences' Committee on Planetary Exploration in January 1993.

OPSWG's review of the Pluto mission's capabilities found that the mission offers to (i) break the logjam in planetary mission costs over \$1 billion, (ii) travel much faster and arrive much sooner than Pluto missions studied in the past, and (iii) carry a four-instrument payload with significantly more capability than Voyager 2 used to study Triton. It would be a travesty if the broader scientific community believed, as the 20 November article suggests, that this exciting and technically viable concept is ill-conceived, incompetent, unreviewed, or without strong community support.

Administrator Daniel Goldin's support for a Pluto mission over the past few months has been inspiring, but there should be no confusion: Pluto's reconnaissance was well up in the review chain before Goldin became NASA's administrator. The fact that a NASA administrator is listening to the desires of working planetary scientists for small missions and making things happen rapidly in an agency formerly characterized by missions that took 15 to 20 years to develop is refreshing.

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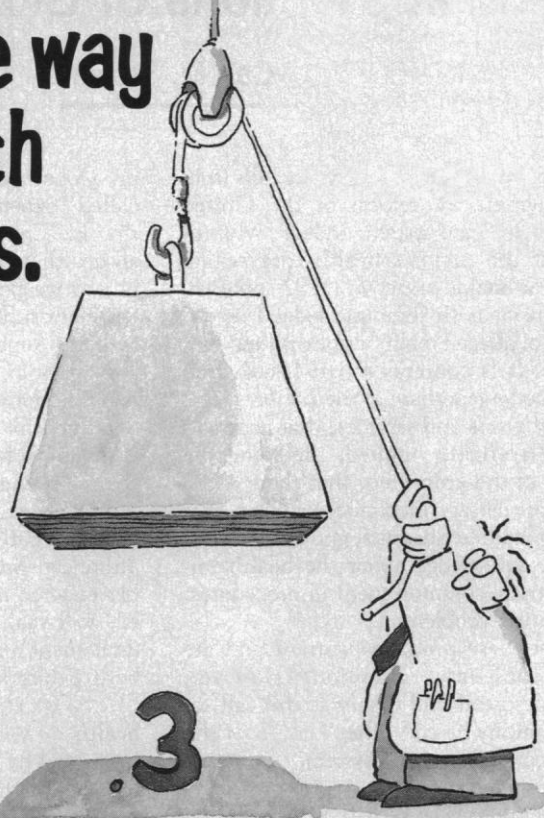
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Response: The reason for highlighting the Pluto mission was not to suggest that it lacks merit but to point out that it has not been through the top-level science review that other big missions have undergone. Thus, while the Pluto fast flyby may have strong support in the planetary community, it has not yet been vetted by scientists in other areas competing for NASA funds. The article pointed out that many space scientists have expressed concern about the dismantling of NASA's panel, which provided a forum for balancing priorities across many disciplines.—*Eliot Marshall*

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