

Chimp Colony Offered for Quick Sale

Scientists working on an AIDS vaccine and other biomedical projects in New Mexico were surprised 2 weeks ago to learn that their lab—which houses the largest chimpanzee colony in the United States—may soon be sold out from under them. The reason: The owner, New Mexico State University (NMSU), says it can't afford the upkeep any longer. The possible sale has already inspired several rescue proposals, including one by Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), who has written to Donna Shalala, the secretary of Health and Human Services, urging the U.S. government to buy the facility.

The flurry of activity centers on the New Mexico Regional Primate Research Laboratory (PRL), which has been in the news over the past few years for its chronic budget and personnel problems (*Science*, 2 November 1990, p. 614 and 5 April 1991, p. 24). PRL houses 335 chimps and 800 macaque monkeys on the grounds of Holloman Air Force Base, and, with a new \$10 million chimp facility, aims to become one of the country's premier AIDS research centers. But NMSU, an agricultural school, has often been at odds with its primate center, and when the federal government last year cut indirect cost reimbursements to PRL from 73.6% to 55.1%, the situation turned dire. NMSU, which has owned PRL for 13 years, decided to sell.

PRL's director, AIDS vaccine researcher Preston Marx, supports the idea of removing the center from NMSU. But he objects to the way it is being done. The Request for Proposals (RFP) that NMSU issued on 22 February had what Marx and others thought was an impossible deadline—18 March. "After over a decade of running such a facility, they need to get rid of it in 3 weeks," asks Marx. Although Marx says he has been instructed to keep quiet, citing "academic freedom," he agreed to speak with *Science*. "As a result of indirect costs," he says, "they're dumping a major research facility."

Marx suspects that PRL already has a buyer lined up: White Sands Research Center, a privately run primate facility also in New Mexico. And Marx, one of the world's top specialists in mucosal immunity and HIV, worries that White Sands will not continue to support the basic research done at PRL, which receives 80% of its funding from the U.S. Public Health Service. If White Sands is the buyer, he adds, "I'd view it as similar to a hostile takeover."

No one at White Sands could be reached for comment. However, Averell Tombes, vice president for research and economic devel-



Any bids? New Mexico Regional Primate Research Lab has the largest chimp colony in the United States.

opment at NMSU, dismisses fears about a sellout. As for White Sands having an inside track, Tombes says, "I don't think that's the case." He adds that "several people have called" about the sale. Tombes says NMSU also believes that "any organization interested in turning in a proposal would have adequate time" to make an offer, and he says the school will consider requests for extensions. Tombes, a biology professor, says he shares Marx's concern about PRL's basic research not being scuttled.

Though the RFP does state that NMSU

"wishes" to have a relationship with the buyer that "must" include access to research animals and facilities, "if available," this language is too flimsy for Marx. "I've had no assurances that AIDS research would be protected," he says.

Ronald Desrosiers of Harvard's New England Regional Primate Research Center, a member of PRL's advisory council, is also alarmed by the RFP. "There's no way anyone's going to make a bid on an organization that big in 3 weeks time," says Desrosiers. "I'm concerned with the health of those chimps, their continued breeding, and that reasonable numbers continue to be made available to researchers."

Marx wrote National Cancer Institute (NCI) director Samuel Broder on 28 February about this "crisis" and asked that NCI attempt to cancel the RFP. NCI wrote back on 4 March that "it would not be appropriate for NCI to attempt to influence the business decisions and activities" of NMSU. Congress, on the other hand, is not bound by the same rules, and Bingaman has written to Shalala suggesting that the federal government run PRL. "I recommend that the facility be transferred to the National Institutes of Health...beginning in fiscal year 1994," he wrote. Marx thinks that's a fine idea. "It's way past time," he says. But so far, neither Shalala nor NIH has expressed any interest.

—Jon Cohen

SCIENTIFIC PUBLISHING

Fallout From Paper on Working Mothers

Rarely has an article in a scientific journal managed to upset so many people, in so many different ways, for so long. Two and a half years after the *Canadian Journal of Physics* (CJP) published what purported to be a scientific study blaming the decline of Western civilization on working mothers, expressions of outrage are still reverberating through the Canadian scientific community. Last month, the reverberations were heard loud and clear at a conference sponsored by the National Research Council (NRC), the journal's publisher, which was supposed to help undo damage caused by the publication. Ironically, at the conference, titled "The Ethics of Scholarly Publishing: A Symposium," NRC vice president Clive Willis, far from undoing the damage, managed to fan the flames further by announcing that the council was not, after all, going to deliver on another fence-mending promise: to publish a special issue of the CJP containing critical reviews of the offending article.

The object of the furor, an article by University of Alberta chemist Gordon Freeman in the September 1990 CJP, reads like a spoof of scientific publishing. Called "Kinetics of Nonhomogeneous Processes in Human So-

ciety: Unethical Behavior and Societal Chaos," it is filled with scientific-sounding jargon and based on bogus scientific methodology ("data" came partly from Freeman's informal chats with students). In the article, Freeman purports to demonstrate that mothers who work inflict "serious psychological damage" on their offspring, giving rise to teenage sex, drug use, insider trading, corrupt political practices, and other social ills.

But the article wasn't a spoof. Freeman, a physical chemist who has expounded similar views in newspaper articles and radio and TV interviews, was the organizer of a conference on chaos theory and guest editor of a special issue of CJP containing the conference proceedings. Though his paper was not presented at the conference, Freeman included it among a batch of conference proceedings he sent to then CJP editor Ralph Nicholls, a physics professor at York University in Ontario. Nicholls sent Freeman's piece out for peer review. When the review came back positive, Nicholls published it.

The outrage that greeted the publication intensified when the NRC dawdled and then took what many Canadian researchers saw as minimal corrective action. A brief retraction