

## NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH

## Strategic Plan Meets the Bureaucracy

If you have a copy of the glossy strategic plan put together by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), hang on to it—you just may own a collector's item. Only 2000 advance copies of the plan, which is meant to chart NIH's path into the 21st century, were printed and released in May. They were supposed to be followed by another 30,000, to be mailed to researchers as well as to movers and shakers in biomedical politics. But that mass printing and mailing has been put on hold by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and it may never take place.

The latest setback to the embattled strategic plan infuriates the plan's patron, newly departed NIH Director Bernadine Healy. Problems began in early May, when NIH's request to print the additional 30,000 copies wound its way to Boyd Work Jr., a communication products manager at HHS who evaluates hundreds of such publication plans each year. The request spelled out how the five-color document was to be printed on pricey, 80-pound "vintage velvet" paper and sent out by first-class mail. The bottom line: a total of \$5.55 per copy of the 118-page document. On reading those numbers, the

efficiency-minded Work turned to his word processor.

Work fired off a memo to his superiors complaining of "extravagant profligacy." He questioned both the costs and the contents of the strategic plan. "Please provide assurances that this plan truly reflects the vision of the Clinton Administration and that it will in no way conflict with the Clinton Administration's framework for health care reform," he wrote. Work questioned how failing to publish the plan would "be detrimental to the legally mandated functions of NIH." He slammed the fact that it was printed on high-grade paper and that, in violation of government regulations, it included photographs that were not necessary to explain the text. He also noted that the glue intended to hold the whole production together was not adhering well to the coated paper.

When Healy read Work's memo, she came unglued. On 7 June, she fired off a memo of her own to Philip Lee, the assistant secretary for health-designate. Writing in her trademark understated fashion, Healy wrote that the Boyd memo "reads like it was written by an 'aparatchik' [sic] of the

Brezhnev-era Kremlin, not by a fellow American and partner in HHS concerned with the health and well-being of this nation." She further stressed that the strategic plan was produced with the full knowledge of HHS Secretary Donna Shalala, Shalala's two predecessors, and key congressional committees. And Healy found it "remarkable" that Work would challenge NIH's need for a strategic plan at all. "Some low-level guy, 16 layers down in communication, can hassle NIH in a profligate way," Healy told *Science*. "It's unbelievable. It's Kafkaesque."

But to HHS, the Work memo is hardly a totalitarian nightmare. "As the memo from Boyd Work makes clear, we're taking a very close look at all publications, not just this one," says HHS spokesman Victor Zonana. Zonana said it may be printed on regular stock in black and white with no photographs. Or it may not be reprinted at all. "I imagine the new director of NIH will want to revisit the strategic plan that Dr. Healy and her team have formulated," said Zonana, adding that he didn't see how to justify printing more copies with Healy leaving. And so it may be that the strategic plan, which has come a long way since Healy commissioned it 2 years ago, may be headed for the old curiosity shop.

—Jon Cohen

## CAMPUS TERRORISM

## Universities on Alert After Bomb Attacks

In the aftermath of mail bomb explosions that seriously injured two researchers last week, security officials at universities across the country went on the alert and are warning faculty members to be on the lookout for suspicious packages. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) believes that both the bombs are the work of a serial bomber who has struck university and technical sites at least 12 times since the late 1970s. But the FBI says it does not know the bomber's motives or intentions.

Last week's bombings, if indeed the work of the suspected serial bomber, are his first attacks since 1987, when witnesses spotted a man placing what later turned out to be a bomb in a parking lot and were able to describe him to the FBI. The first of the most recent bombs exploded on 22 June when University of California, San Francisco (UCSF), geneticist Charles Epstein opened a package he received at home. Two days later, a similar bomb exploded in the hands of Yale computer scientist David Gelernter while he opened his mail in his office.

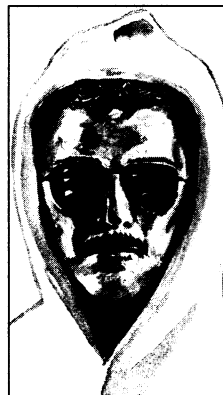
In the earlier attacks, the bomber mostly targeted computer scientists and high-tech professionals, although one University of Michigan psychology professor was injured

in 1985. Seven of the 12 bombs prior to last week's attacks involved universities, leading the FBI to refer to the suspect as the university bomber. FBI spokesman Nestor Michnyak declined to comment on specific leads and theories that the agency was pursuing in the latest cases. He says that while "we've never been able to explain motive" in the earlier attacks, the agency has linked the explosions by forensic means.

Investigators have not yet identified any reason why these two particular researchers were targeted. Epstein, a well-regarded geneticist and professor of pediatrics at UCSF, is the editor of the *American Journal of Human Genetics*. In the past, he served on the National Institutes of Health Recombinant DNA Advisory Committee, which reviews proposed experiments involving gene-splicing and human subjects.

Gelernter, director of Yale's undergraduate computer science program, is also a well-known researcher, prominent for his work in distributed computing and parallel process-

ing. His brother, Joel Gelernter, is a Yale psychiatrist who specializes in genetics research. The switchboard at the Yale medical center where Joel Gelernter works received a call after the explosion from someone who said "you are next," but officials say they found no bomb and have no reason to believe that Joel Gelernter was a target.



**Sketchy evidence.** FBI drawing of suspect.

Last week the U.S. Attorney General issued a warning to all U.S. universities to be on alert for further attacks, especially in computer and biomedical areas. In response, most universities warned their faculty and staff to watch out for suspicious packages and circulated updates on the explosions and the descriptions of the bombs. The Epstein bomb was described as a large padded manila envelope containing an object of about the dimensions of a videocassette. It was postmarked from Sacramento and bore the return address of James Hill, chairman of the chemistry department at California State University in Sacramento. Hill told the FBI that he had never heard of Epstein and did not send the package. He is not considered a suspect. The Yale package was also a manila enve-