

SCIENCE

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LETTERS

AIDS Activism and the OAR

As the co-author of the report (1) that provided the framework for the expansion of the powers of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of AIDS Research (OAR) in the NIH Revitalization Act of 1993 and one of the key individuals involved in advocating for the congressional approval of these provisions, I must take exception to Jon Cohen's revisionist elaboration of recent events ("Conflicting agendas shape NIH," Special News Report, 24 Sept., p. 1674).

First, the opposition of the directors of the NIH institutes to the plans to enhance the OAR's responsibilities and authorities was based on the first draft of the legislation. Subsequently, the director of the National Cancer Institute, Samuel Broder, worked with staff members in the Department of Health and Human Services and Senator Edward M. Kennedy's (D-MA) office to address the institute directors' concerns.

Second, there was, indeed, significant support among the extramural AIDS research community for the strengthening of the OAR, as embodied in the bill. Cohen recalls the opposition, but he does not mention the group of more than 200 AIDS researchers whose support was vital to the passage of the legislation.

Third, Cohen portrays AIDS activists as uniformly and strongly "in favor of targeted research," and while unstated, the presumption is, at the expense of investigator-initiated work. My organization issued a report (2) at the IXth International Conference on AIDS in Berlin this summer, of which I am the author, which belies Cohen's assertions. The report, the product of interviews with three dozen leading scientists in basic research on AIDS, calls for an increase in investigator-initiated awards (R01s) for AIDS, which have steadily decreased over the past several years. The report also calls into question the usefulness and feasibility of a massive directed research effort or "Manhattan Project" for AIDS.

AIDS activists have forged productive partnerships with many AIDS researchers. Our contributions, particularly in the area of clinical research on HIV infection, have been widely acknowledged. The polarization between the research community and people with HIV and their advocates has largely abated in recent years as we realize the common goals we share with scientists

and the complexity of the scientific problems which AIDS presents.

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References

1. G. Gonsalves and M. Harrington, "AIDS research at the NIH: A critical review" (Treatment Action Group, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 1992).
2. G. Gonsalves, "Basic research on HIV infection: A report from the front" (Treatment Action Group, Berlin, Germany, 1993).

Response: I agree with Gonsalves that the tension between AIDS activists and researchers is abating, and I did not mean to portray all AIDS activists as being strongly in favor of targeted research. But Gonsalves is omitting a key point I made in my article: Many breast cancer and AIDS activists are not trying to undermine basic research, but to better organize it. And indeed, when Gonsalves was lobbying for the OAR legislation, he—and, yes, many AIDS researchers—argued for what TAG called "a meaningful long-range strategic plan" to "prioritize among critical scientific issues, evaluate current AIDS programs, suggest changes, and recommend necessary resource reallocation or new programs." True, this is not calling for abolishing investigator-initiated research, but it is calling for targeting. And by definition, targeting clashes with unfettered basic research, and that is the source of the current tension between these activists and some researchers (including several institute directors).—**Jon Cohen**

Multiregional Evolution

Under Corrections and Clarifications of 17 September (p. 1508), it is noted that reference 4 in the article "Demic expansions and human evolution" by L. L. Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* (29 Jan., p. 639) was incorrect. The corrected reference is given as "F. Weidenreich, *Evolution* 1, 221 (1947); C. Coon, *The Living Races of Man* (Knopf, New York, 1965). . . ."

If only one of Coon's books were to be cited, the correct one would surely be *The Origin of Races* (1), not *The Living Races of Man*. The earlier work dealt explicitly and extensively with Coon's theories about the origin and evolution of what he considered to