

edited by RICHARD STONE

AIDS Scandal Embroils Top French Biologist...

The French HIV-contaminated blood saga refuses to go away—and now, one of the country's top biologists is being dragged into the affair. Last week, the newspaper *Libération* published excerpts of memos written in 1985 by government advisers, including former Pasteur Institute director François Gros, a former adviser to then-prime minister Laurent Fabius. The memos, argued Bernard Seytre, who wrote the *Libération* article and translated Robert Gallo's book *Virus Hunters*, suggested that officials delayed registration in France of an HIV blood test made by Abbott Laboratories of Illinois so that a test marketed by the French company Diagnostic Pasteur could be released first.

For at least 2 years, the French government has been rocked by allegations that officials were aware that HIV-infected blood

products were given knowingly to hemophiliacs during 1985. Two officials are now serving prison sentences as a result (*Science*, 23 July 1993, p. 422).

The documents revealed last week include a note from Gros to Louis Schweitzer, cabinet secretary to Fabius. As excerpted in *Libération*, the note mentions the risk "of seeing the Abbott test flood the French market, since we cannot withhold approval of this test...for very much longer." The note, dated 3 July 1985—some 3 weeks before the Abbott test was approved—complains that some hospitals "were tactless enough to order all their tests from Abbott, a gesture which I find personally distasteful."

Gros denies he tried to delay the test's approval. "If the registration...took longer than I had initially estimated, it is for a whole series of circumstances



the soiree. But the meeting was subdued and the discussion very general, says one scientist. The reason, he says, is that the scientists felt substantive planning should come after government heads agree to attend the meeting as well as commit to funding a

OAR Director, Part II

After an aborted attempt to lure a top virologist to head the powerful Office of AIDS Research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) (*Science*, 28 January, p. 459), NIH Director Harold Varmus has settled on immunologist William Paul for the job. A 26-year NIH veteran whose lab discovered the immune messenger interleukin-4, Paul's nomination now awaits approval from top brass at the Department of Health and Human Services.

[budgetary and technical] in which I was only indirectly involved," he told *Science*. As for the 3 July memo, Gros says he was writing in a personal capacity, having stepped down as Fabius's adviser several days before; the aim, he says, was "not to impair Abbott entering the market, but...to allow the [Diagnostic Pasteur] test to capture a modest share of this market, the majority still being controlled by Abbott."

long-term program to strengthen AIDS prevention and education.

A spokesman for the White House Office of Aids Policy says Director Kristine Gebbie plans to attend, and that the office will "sort out other high-level participation" later this month. Summit invitations are expected shortly; a larger planning meeting will be held in Paris on 7 April.

GAO to Plumb Feder and Stewart Case

Former scientific fraud cops Ned Feder and Walter Stewart are about to squint into the harsh light of inquiry themselves—but not for anything they've done. At the request of Senators Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and William Cohen (R-ME), the General Accounting Office (GAO) will investigate the circumstances that led the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to transfer two of its more-recognizable employees to desk jobs.

Originally hired as NIH scientists, Feder and Stewart gained fame in 1991 for their dogged pursuit of misconduct allegations against Nobelist David Baltimore. The duo's publicly funded inquiries halted with their transfers last April, a week after they were assailed for investigating plagiarism charges against a historian (*Science*, 16 April 1993, p. 288).

Grassley, a co-author of the Whistle-Blower Protection Act, which aims to shield federal employees against arbitrary personnel actions, has taken up Feder and Stewart as a cause célèbre. This follows his earlier decision to delay Harold Varmus's Senate confirmation as NIH Director until the feds provided a better explanation of the duo's transfer. According to a spokesperson for Grassley, the Senator wants GAO to dig deeper because he is not satisfied with the response thus far.

ORI Drops Case Against MSU Student

Last week, the Office of Research Integrity (ORI) of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) dropped charges against Michigan State University (MSU) grad student Maie ElKassaby, who was found guilty of misconduct by an MSU-sponsored investigation in 1992.

ORI's tent-folding began last summer, when an HHS appeals board overturned two ORI guilty verdicts. Moreover, the board ruled that ORI must prove in its cases not only that misconduct occurred, but that an accused scientist intended to commit fraud.

ElKassaby was dismissed from her research post in May 1989 by MSU pathologist Jeff Williams. ElKassaby alleged she was terminated illegally, and published a paper based partly on lab data she had taken without Williams' permission (*Science*, 29 January 1993, p. 592). In November 1990, Williams charged ElKassaby and university officials who helped her with misconduct. After investigating, MSU exonerated its own officials but found ElKassaby guilty; she appealed.

In dropping the case, ORI officials say they were hamstrung by the appeals board. ElKassaby's actions "might not be significantly egregious to be considered a serious deviation from accepted practices" given the board's recent decisions, ORI deputy director Thomas Morford told *Science*.

Williams told MSU's *State News* last week that the decision was "a measure of the ORI's incompetence that they're unable to arrive at a definition of scientific misconduct that's tenable."

ElKassaby, still an MSU grad student, says she's "relieved." She has agreed to acknowledge that her conduct was "improper" and to allow MSU to supervise her research for a year, Morford says. And, he says, she must adhere to a federal rule stipulating that "the principal investigator is the individual designated by an institution to have all the data relating to a grant."

...As French Ponder Hosting AIDS Summit

France may soon set the stage for a new international campaign in the battle against AIDS. The French government has proposed an "AIDS Summit" in Paris on 17 June to which it hopes to lure President Bill Clinton and other major world leaders.

After sounding out officials at the World Health Organization's Global Program on AIDS (GPA) last fall, the French government revealed its proposal at an AIDS meeting in Morocco on 12 December. The summit is a pet project of Simone Veil, France's minister of health and social affairs. In an interview last month with the French daily *Libération*, Veil said the French wanted to convene the leaders of 17 countries with large foreign-aid budgets. She said the summit would emphasize AIDS prevention and research in developing countries, particularly those in Africa.

Several prominent AIDS researchers met in Paris last month to discuss a technical agenda for