SCIENCESCOPE

edited by RICHARD STONE

ORI Ready to Rein Itself In

The scientific fraud police at one federal agency—the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)—appear ready to pull in their horns and accept a more narrowly defined beat.

According to Alan Price, a biologist on the staff of HHS' Office of Research Integrity (ORI), the agency is prepared to acknowledge that its area of patrol should be limited to cases in which a researcher has plagiarized another's work or deliberately fabricated or falsified data.

This is welcome news to critics of the government's anti-fraud effort, such as University of California, Berkeley, biologist Howard Schachman. For years, Schachman has argued that HHS' definition of fraud—which now includes the phrase "practices that seriously deviate from those that are commonly accepted within the scientific community for proposing, conducting, or reporting research"—is too vague and should be narrowed.

Speaking at a meeting of the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology in Washington, D.C., earlier this week, Price said that his office is ready to drop the controversial "deviation" clause. Next month, he said, ORI plans to send proposed substitute wording to a special commission created by Congress to review the topic of scientific fraud and recommend changes in enforcement. Price said that in place of the existing catchall phrase, ORI is ready to substitute a clause prohibiting "deliberate misrepresentation of data and data analysis."

This and other suggestions will be considered by a 12-member commission, chaired by Kenneth John Ryan of the Brigham & Women's Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts. The group is scheduled to meet for the first time on 20 June, and it is supposed to report back to Congress and HHS with recommendations on how to enforce research integrity within 120 days.

Environment Institute

Senator Barbara Mikulski (D–MD) was expected to introduce a bill earlier this week to create a National Institute for the Environment (NIE), an agency that would award peer-reviewed environmental research grants. Unlike a similar bill in the House, the Senate version proposes an NIE budget: $100 million in 1995. One Hill staffer predicts Congress could pass a bill and put it on the President's desk by this fall.

Skinnier Rodents, Better Toxicology Tests?

Some people may think that lab rodents deserve to eat as much as they want in view of the sacrifices they make for biomedical research. But you won't find this sentiment expressed by toxicologists, who use the critters to test whether substances cause cancer. Researchers at toxicology labs are increasingly concerned that by indulging their appetites, rats and mice are getting too fat, dying too young, and cluttering up bioassays with irrelevant data. In an effort to rectify this trend and preserve a valuable resource, scientists at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have now begun drafting a document that might call for putting lab rodents on a strict diet.

Lab rats these days are about 25% heavier than their ancestors were 20 years ago. The result has been a steady rise in the background rate of mammary and pituitary tumors, says toxicologist Ghanta Rao of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS). With cancer so prevalent in control animals, it's getting harder and harder to tease out the effects of carcinogens, Rao says.

One quick fix might be a weight-watchers program for rodents. Over the last few years FDA and NIEHS, building on earlier work, have accumulated evidence suggesting that cutting lab rats' calories by a mere 10% can extend their lives and reduce the background tumor incidence.

However, not everyone agrees that dietary restriction is the answer. A better fix, asserts Rao, would be to change the rodents, not their diet, by breeding animals that grow more slowly and reproduce later in life. Rao will get a chance to argue his case when he responds to FDA's dietary restriction opus, due to be released for public comment later this year.

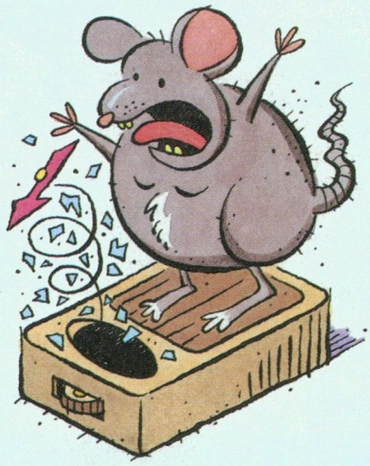

ILLUSTRATION: TERRY E. SMITH

Search Committee for *Science* Chief

A committee has been established to draw up a short list of candidates to succeed Daniel E. Koshland Jr. as editor-in-chief of *Science*. Koshland, who became editor in 1985, announced in February that he will step down next year when a successor has been named.

The search committee, chaired by F. Sherwood Rowland of the University of California, Irvine, has put out a call for nominations (see page 1353 for the names of committee members and procedures for submitting nominations). Rowland says the committee is looking for candidates with "scientific backgrounds sufficiently strong that the community will respect their scientific achievements," and "the ability to write well and recognize good writing." The structure of the job, including whether it would be a full-time or a part-time position, is "something to talk to individual candidates about," said Rowland.

The committee will screen candidates and recommend three to the AAAS Board of Directors, which will make the final selection.

Brown's NASA Budget Would Cut Mars Probe

Planetary scientists received an unpleasant surprise last week from an unexpected source when Representative George Brown (D–CA) offered up the planned Mars Surveyor mission on a plate of budget cuts aimed to preserve the space station.

Brown, a staunch station supporter in years past, said this spring he would oppose the President's $2.1-billion request for the station in 1995 if Congress didn't give the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) enough money to carry out its core science and technology programs, too. But last week, shortly after the House appropriations subcommittee that oversees NASA received an allocation almost certainly too small to meet the agency's $14.3-billion request for 1995, Brown drew up a $14.15-billion alternative that he called the smallest budget able to fund both the station and space science. The plan would eliminate most of the $127 million NASA has requested for Surveyor—a multi-year effort to revisit the planet after the sudden loss last summer of Mars Observer (*Science*, 3 September, p. 1264)—and it would cancel a microgravity mission on spacelab and at least one shuttle payload a year.

Scientists involved in Surveyor have assailed Brown's proposal. It "would be a disaster for space science," says Alden Albee of the California Institute of Technology, mission scientist for Mars Observer and part of a team figuring out how to adapt Observer instruments for launches on smaller rockets over the next several years. "Surveyor is supposed to be an example of smaller, cheaper, faster, but this would also be stupider," he says.

Brown says he favors fundamental research and technology development "because it has a more immediate payoff" than the station. But in a tight budget year, he says his proposal "sends a signal to scientists that they won't get all they need or want, either."