to respond quickly and decisively to new discoveries with commercial potential. And it sets out five goals for making sure science will pay off (see table).

Researchers who have read advance copies applaud the paper's tone and content. "It should reassure the scientific and medical communities that this Administration cares about research," says Robert White, president of the National Academy of Engineering. "And that will be very welcome," White adds, because "it could have been otherwise."

Indeed, the policy paper, crafted by the Office of Science and Technology Policy under the direction of associate director M. R. C. Greenwood, is widely seen as an opportunity for the White House to mend fences. One month after taking office, President Clinton issued a 36-page policy paper on the importance of technology in fostering economic growth. Although research—specifically, world leadership in basic science and engineering—was listed as one of three technology goals, it was a meager six-paragraph footnote to the overall policy statement, which served as rationale for a proposed $17-billion investment package (*Science*, 26 February 1993, p. 1244). Academic researchers were upset by what they perceived as an emphasis on technology at the expense of basic research. Their fears were heightened by congressional pressure on the National Science Foundation (NSF) to pursue more "strategic research."

To counter that perception, Greenwood organized a national forum last winter (*Science*, 4 February, p. 604), which was attended by 250 prominent researchers and science administrators. The views they expressed at the meeting are sprinkled throughout this week's document, which also incorporates parts of recent reports on the need for a new federal policy toward science from the National Academy of Sciences and the National Science Board, which oversees NSF. The report also offers nine one-page vignettes, covering subjects ranging from the life cycle of cells to galactic black holes, all of which make the point that fundamental research can have unexpected practical results. "I don't think that it's possible to oversell the value of fundamental research," says Greenwood about the underlying message of the short descriptions of science in action. "We want people to understand that the nation needs science more than ever."

The job of transforming this philosophy toward science into policy goes to the new National Science and Technology Council (NSTC), which is also charged with evaluating how the nation ranks internationally in every major scientific field. The document is silent on where to obtain additional funding, saying only that "this modest increment should be shared by the federal government and the private sector." But the lack of detail doesn't bother Roland Schmitt, president emeritus of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York, who has just completed 12 years on the science board. "You don't solve problems in this town by trying to hit a home run," says Schmitt. "This gives us a place to start, and the NSTC offers a mechanism for getting things done."

–Jeffrey Mervis

ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

Death Threats and Trial by Tabloid

It may not be Rockefeller University's worst nightmare, but it must be high on the list. First, a series of bizarre and threatening incidents plagues a prestigious molecular biology laboratory, and the police are called in to investigate. Then 6 weeks later the story leaks out, and the tabloids have a field day. The question, as far as Rockefeller administrators are concerned, is which was worse.

The incidents occurred in the 15th-floor laboratory of Robert Roeder, who has done pioneering work on the mechanisms of gene transcription in mammalian cells. They began on 6 June, when a dozen researchers became sick, first with diarrhea and then nausea and vomiting. The researchers wrote it off as food poisoning and discarded the coffee, sugar, and sweeteners that seemed to have been the common link. Later that day, however, several Bunsen burners were discovered with their valves opened, filling the laboratory with flammable gases. Two days later, towels were found burning in a supply closet. And finally, letters addressed to two female scientists turned up in a women's bathroom saying the women would be killed if they did not quit the laboratory. The anonymous letters also identified the poison that had caused the stomach ailments as "S.F.," or sodium fluoride, which is lethal in large doses.

By that time the New York City police had been called in, as well as university security and an outside private detective. Members of the 40-person lab volunteered to take polygraph tests and give blood for DNA analysis, apparently for comparison with DNA from traces left on the death-threat letters. University officials tightened security and hoped to solve the case internally. "We had obviously hoped that this should be solved quietly," said Nobel Prize–winning biologist and Rockefeller president Torsten Wiesel, in an interview with *Science*. "We were working from the position that whoever was to blame was obviously under great stress and needed help." Wiesel added that when no incidents occurred after the first week, he had become optimistic. "I had hoped that somehow it would resolve itself in a dignified way."

"[W]hoever was to blame was obviously under great stress and needed help."

—Torsten Wiesel

Rockefeller was not so lucky, however. The story was leaked to *The Wall Street Journal*, which ran it on page 1 on 26 July as a variation on an Agatha Christie novel: "Who's Trying to Kill the Great Biologists of Rockefeller U.?" What followed, says Doron Weber, director of public affairs at the University, was a "circus." Rockefeller was flooded by calls from the press, including such tabloid television news shows as "A Current Affair" and "Unsolved Mysteries." The day after the *Journal* story ran, the police handling the investigation held a press conference. John Hill, chief of Manhattan detectives, announced that the police had a suspect—a "peer" of the women scientists—but not enough evidence yet to make an arrest. Meanwhile, an unnamed police source blamed a "mad scientist."

The next morning the New York tabloids gave the story their least dignified treatment. The *Daily News* front-page headline trumpeted the coming of "Weird Science" at Rockefeller and dubbed the incidents "the Case of the Mad Scientist and the Green-Eyed Monster." *Daily News* columnist Mike McAlary managed to get in the seemingly obligatory reference to the O. J. Simpson case by noting that Roeder's biologists are among "the class of scientific investigators who will wind up testing blood in the O. J. Simpson case." The *New York Post* settled for a headline announcing "Mad Scientist Breeding Terror in Cancer Lab."

Rockefeller administrators still refuse to comment publicly on the details of the case, although Wiesel said he was saddened that the press didn't at least put the story in a compassionate context: "that the stress in science is great, the competition is enormous, and it's not surprising something like this would happen." On the brighter side, Weisel added, the papers did mention that DNA was found to be the genetic material at Rockefeller. "That's more publicity for the DNA discovery than we've had so far," he said.

–Gary Taubes