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## Paleontologists Make Bones Over Survey

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), targeted for elimination by some budget-cutting Republicans, is now getting some help from the trenches—paleontological excavation trenches, that is.

The call for help went out over the Internet last week: "We all know the USGS is in 'deep do-do' right now," wrote one paleontology discussion group member, exhorting colleagues who usually concentrate on stones and bones to take political action. The USGS drew praise for map-making, hazard assessment and forecasting, mineral resource evaluation, and water quality measurement, as well as the fruitful

employment of several paleontologists. Paleontologists on the net responded with a flurry of electronic hosannas posted back to the discussion group. Villains were named and locations given: Friends of USGS were urged in the original notice to write to House Speaker Newt Gingrich and John Kasich, chair of the House Budget Committee. Another message urged paleontologists do things "the modern way" by e-mailing Gingrich at georgia6@hr.house.gov.

While such efforts are appreciated—"We're pleased with the support we're hearing from around the country," says USGS spokesperson Donovan Kelly—sometimes political activism has a learning curve. The original message suggested sending a "snail-mail" letter to Kasich at the U.S. Senate. A subsequent message quietly pointed out that Kasich is a member of the House.

## DOD Medical Research Remains Imperiled

The only thing certain about Department of Defense (DOD) funding for AIDS and breast cancer research right now is that it remains in jeopardy. Lobbyists, bureaucrats, and elected officials have been battling behind the scenes over whether to keep these programs in the military budget. Last week, the scuffle broke into the open, as defense advocates tried to kick the pro-

grams out of the Pentagon. They lost, but the battle continues.

The fracas surfaced on 10 February, when White House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta wrote Secretary of Defense William Perry that President Clinton was "very disturbed" to have read in that morning's *Washington Post* about the Pentagon's plans to cut funding for AIDS and breast cancer research. DOD had planned to use the money for other purposes on the grounds that AIDS and breast cancer have little to do with the Pentagon's objective at the moment—building combat readiness. But Panetta wrote that the president gave this medical research "a high priority" and wanted it done. After getting the letter, Perry said DOD has "no intention of blocking" the \$180 million expenditure on AIDS and breast cancer research.

But these programs are still in the line of fire. Perry noted that DOD has "been exploring whether the money can be managed most effectively" by scientists at the National Institutes of Health. And Congress may launch some salvos of its own, says Steve Morin, an aide to Representative Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), who has fought for the programs. Morin notes that the Republican-led Congress may try to rescind the research money, perhaps as soon as next week, when it's expected to debate funding for a new disaster relief bill.

## NAS Gets Reprieve On Radiation Study

Intending to end a fractious dispute between two federal bodies, the Department of Energy (DOE) has decided to extend, for 1 year, the National Academy of Sciences's (NAS's) role as co-administrator of a study of Japanese atomic bomb survivors.

The dispute centers on who will run the Radiation Effects Research Foundation (RERF), a body funded by the United States and Japan to monitor the health of 120,000 people who survived atomic bomb blasts in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. DOE was expected later this year to transfer administration of the \$18 million U.S. portion of the RERF grant from NAS to Columbia University; the move upset some radiation biologists, who argued that the academy was well suited to administer the politically sensitive research program (*Science*, 3 February, p. 611).

A top DOE official insists this was never a done deal. After Columbia submitted an unsolicited proposal to manage RERF last fall, DOE and school officials held discussions about how and when Columbia might take over the project. However, says Paul Seligman, DOE's deputy assistant secretary for health studies, "we never awarded any contract." According to Seligman, after some scientists objected to the proposed deal, DOE decided to extend the academy's contract for a year, to 1 April 1996. After this date, he says, DOE is likely "to move to a consortium of universities" to manage RERF.

DOE officials say it's high time the agency opened the RERF grant to competition. If DOE were to allow competition, NAS would be unlikely to submit a proposal because its bylaws prohibit it from competing for grants. However, says an NAS official, President Harry Truman directed the academy to conduct the study. "It's a directive for us to do it, not a directive for us to do it until DOE finds someone it thinks can do it better," he says.

## Dingell: Can't Vouch for "Gallo Report"?

Erstwhile scientific inquisitor John Dingell appears to have distanced himself from a highly critical report on AIDS researcher Robert Gallo, signaling what could be the final chapter in the controversy over Gallo's role in the discovery of the AIDS virus.

In a 3 February letter to National Institutes of Health (NIH) Director Harold Varmus, Representative Dingell (D-MI), former chair of a House investigatory committee, said he was unable to "vouch for the authenticity or accuracy" of a copy of a draft report on Gallo—authored by Dingell's staff—that was leaked to the press last month (*Science*, 20 January, p. 319). Dingell further states that the draft report, which Varmus had received from scientific "fraudbusters" Ned Feder and Walter Stewart, was "not reviewed, much less evaluated, by the staff director, the chair-

man, or any other member of the subcommittee."

A Dingell staffer insists his boss remains concerned about the role Gallo played in the discovery of the AIDS virus and how the federal government handled allegations that Gallo's lab had "misappropriated" a virus given to them by French AIDS researchers. Dingell, the staffer says, was "a little upset that drafts got out" and "doesn't really understand why [Feder and Stewart] would be involved in this."

Shows how well Dingell knows Stewart and Feder. According to Stewart, the NIH duo wants Varmus to take up the mantle of ferreting out inappropriate behavior in science, and, as they wrote him in a 23 January letter, to "bring the enclosed report to the attention of the appropriate authorities." Varmus did not respond to queries from *Science*.