

Clinton Holds First AIDS Summit

When the President of the United States speaks, people listen. That's why the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV and AIDS recommended at its first meeting this summer that Bill Clinton hold a summit to declare the disease a national priority and outline his vision for ending the epidemic. Just such a gathering took place last week, and although it had all the trappings of a staged political event—including the prearranged announcement of two new strategies to better coordinate AIDS research—many of the 250 participants hailed Clinton for using his bully pulpit to rally attacks against a disease that former Oval Office occupants rarely even mentioned by name. "I was skeptical about what we could get out of this," says Anthony Fauci, head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. "But I thought it was actually good. At the very least, it signified the President's interest and commitment to following up on what he has promised."

The all-day White House Conference on HIV and AIDS* gathered Administration officials—including two Cabinet members, National Institutes of Health (NIH) Director Harold Varmus, and Food and Drug Administration director David Kessler—with leading AIDS researchers, activists, educators, and caregivers. The participants spent the morning in nine working groups (which were closed to the press) that laid out the issues they wanted Clinton to confront on everything from biomedical research to the problems of discrimination and housing of HIV-infected people. After lunch, they packed into an ornate room in the Treasury Building, where, with television cameras broadcasting live, Clinton gave a speech that was repeatedly interrupted by hand-reddening applause. He then joined a roundtable discussion that recapped the morning meetings.

In his talk, Clinton outlined two new strategies—obviously arrived at before the working groups had met—to speed the search for a cure and preventives. The first plan is to have Vice President Al Gore convene a meeting with pharmaceutical industry leaders to look for ways to speed development of drugs, vaccines, and chemical barriers known as vaginal microbicides. Plan number two calls for Patsy Fleming, head of the White House's Office of National AIDS Policy, to form a working group with representatives from the various governmental departments doing AIDS research. Clinton said he wants a report from this group within 90 days, outlining a coordinated research



Politics as unusual. AIDS Czarina Patsy Fleming and Clinton check in with White House meeting attendees.

program. "We can't afford any unnecessary delays or missed opportunities," said Clinton. "And I'm convinced that these two steps will help us to avoid those."

Clinton tapped William Paul, head of NIH's Office of AIDS Research (OAR), to chair the intergovernmental review. The OAR is currently in the middle of a major review of NIH's entire AIDS research portfolio, and Paul says scientists from the committees performing that study may make up the core of the new panel. One issue that Paul would like to see reviewed by the new panel is the overlap between epidemiology studies done separately by NIH and the Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention. According to a preliminary draft report from the OAR review, the government would get more bang for its buck if these programs had "much clearer integration," says Paul.

Clinton vowed at the conference that he would "oppose any effort to undermine" the OAR itself, which his Administration helped revamp in 1993 by giving it the power to oversee NIH's entire AIDS research budget. Congress has threatened to take this power away, ostensibly so that AIDS won't be treated differently from other diseases; the OAR won't learn its fate until the congressional budget passes.

Although Clinton did his fair share of talking at the conference, he also sat back and listened for much of the 90 minutes he spent at the meeting. "Shake me up," he urged the participants. Bob Ledrer, a reporter from the AIDS magazine *POZ*, did just that at the meeting's end, breaking the good cheer of the event by yelling out at Clinton that he had spent too much time on revising "organizational charts" and not enough on "specific actions that will save lives today." Onlookers, who included many invited AIDS activists, hissed "shhh" at Ledrer so that Clinton could respond. "In the context of what has happened in this country in the last 3 years, I believe we have gone a long way toward doing what we said we'd do," replied Clinton. "But I will never be satisfied—and you won't and shouldn't be—until we have solved the problem."

—Jon Cohen

PLANETARY SCIENCE

Probe Takes a Fatal Plunge at Jupiter

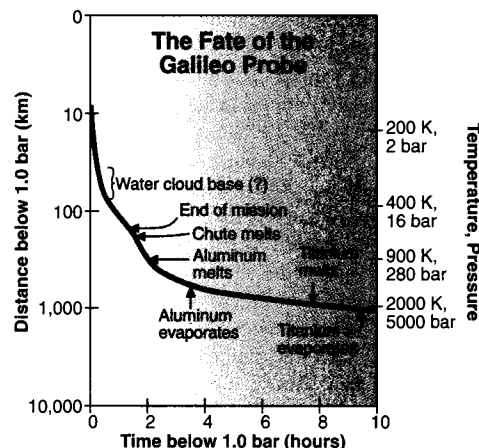
After a 6-year voyage plagued by a crippled main antenna and a balky tape recorder, the Galileo spacecraft flawlessly parked itself in orbit around Jupiter last week. Researchers will release the first data from the giant planet next week: the last words of a probe that parachuted through Jupiter's clouds on 7 December. Its hour-long observations were relayed to the parent spacecraft, which

slipped into orbit just afterward. There they were stored for later transmission.

Having completed its task, the probe continued its plunge into the searing depths of Jupiter's atmosphere. Jonathan Lunine of the University of Arizona and Rich Young of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration Ames Research Center decided to calculate what must have happened next. One possibility they quickly dismissed was that the probe eventually reached a layer of atmosphere dense enough for it to float. Instead, as they report in the latest issue of *The Planetary Report*, it continued to fall into ever hotter layers.

About half an hour after the probe's transmissions ended, the Dacron parachute melted and the probe began a free fall. Another 40 minutes, and the probe's aluminum structure was a rain of molten drops. Six hours later, at a depth of 1000 kilometers and a temperature of 1700 degrees Celsius, the titanium shell succumbed. In as little as 10 hours after its plunge began, all remnants of the probe had vaporized and become part of the jovian atmosphere.

—T.A.



* The "White House Conference on HIV and AIDS" was held in Washington, D.C., on 6 December.