

Science

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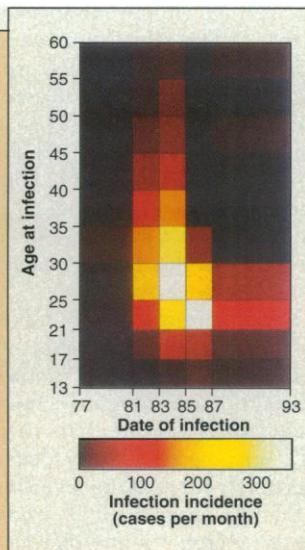
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LETTERS

Political points

Sharply different approaches to U.S. science policy and funding are highlighted: Is the White House emphasizing “politics over science”? Three researchers discuss how looking at patients by ethnic group can sometimes be helpful (if one is learning about AIDS awareness and prevention) or harmful (if one mistakenly infers causation from the categorization): Should such comparisons be made? [At right, estimated number of AIDS infections per month among white males in the United States, 1977–1993 (P. S. Rosenberg *et al.*, Reports, 24 Nov., p. 1372)]. The validity of a global warming trend is further debated: How much of the related climate research has been peer-reviewed? Another writer alleges that NASA is “continually reducing support” for technical infrastructure at U.S. universities: Will this lead to the disappearance of “hands-on training” for young scientists and engineers?



Rohrabacher re Gore

I read with interest the coverage of “Heavy hitter,” U.S. Vice President Al Gore’s speech to the recent AAAS annual meeting (News & Comment, 16 Feb., p. 903). On reflection, I must admit that Al Gore was right about one thing: There are indeed major differences between the White House and the Republican-led Congress on science and technology issues.

While Gore may maintain that weakening our patent system to the lower standards of Japan helps American inventors, more than 200 members of the House of Representatives who have co-sponsored the Patent Term Restoration Act do not.

While Gore may maintain that it is more important to pay Fortune 100 corporations to develop product-related technology than it is to fund basic science, Republicans in Congress do not.

While Gore may maintain that it is more important to subsidize foreign-owned corporations in selling solar technology to the Third World, we in Congress would rather allocate every single solar energy research and development dollar to real research.

And while Gore may choose to ravage NASA’s space science budget to fund the engineering-driven Mission to Planet Earth and to push corporate welfare “conservation programs” over scientific research at the Department of Energy, those choices clearly belie his exhortation to support “knowledge . . . for knowledge’s own sake.”

In the context of balancing the federal budget, Republicans in Congress have largely protected basic, fundamental research as a wellspring of progress and freedom. It has been Gore’s White House that has emphasized politics over science, to the detriment of both.

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AIDS and Ethnicity

Philip S. Rosenberg (Reports, 24 Nov., p. 1372) finds human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) more prevalent in younger and non-white groups. His figures indicate that AIDS is largely a disease of poverty, not of age or ethnicity.

U.S. black women are 15 times, and Hispanic women 7 times, more likely to be HIV-infected than are white non-Hispanic women. Black males are 4.7 times and Hispanic men are 3 times more likely to be infected than are white males. This HIV pattern corresponds to the rates of blacks (33%), Hispanics (29%), and whites (9%) living on incomes below poverty guidelines in 1992. Within each race, younger people (15 to 24 years old) are twice as likely to be impoverished (21%) than are older people (25 to 59 years old) (11%) (1).