RANDOM SAMPLES

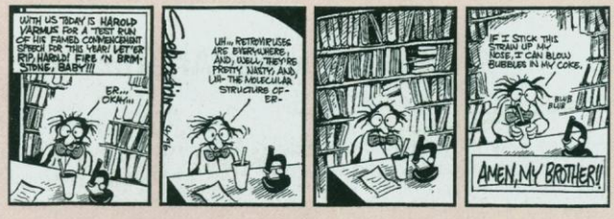
edited by CONSTANCE HOLDEN

Reconciliation in San Diego

A spat between the partners who run a National Science Foundation (NSF)–funded supercomputing center in San Diego has been patched up, easing doubts about the center's chances for continued funding.

The San Diego Supercomputing Center (SDSC) is based at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD); the school began feuding this spring with its partner, General Atomics, which manages the center, in part over division of profits from software and other products (*Science*, 22 March, p. 1657). The tiff triggered the resignation of director Sid Karin, a General Atomics vice president, and cast doubt on SDSC's chances for continued funding from NSF, which is reducing the number of centers it supports from four to three or fewer and which wants the survivors to represent multipartner alliances.

In April UCSD submitted a preproposal to the NSF that left out General Atomics. But earlier this month, the two sides announced that General Atomics will go back onto the final proposal in September. The university and the company will share in profits from UCSD products in proportion to the affiliation of the researchers. "On an operating level, it's not that big a difference," says Karin, who would still head SDSC, but as a UCSD employee. Peace now reigns. "Everybody ... is happy to be looking at more substantive and interesting problems," says Karin—chiefly writing a strong proposal. Chimes in General Atomics Vice Chair Linden Blue: "We've been a good team with USCD for 12 years now, and I think it's going to be even better in the future."



Harvard Elite, or Illiterate?

Harold Varmus, director of the U.S. National Institutes of Health and Nobel laureate, may be an internationally known and respected figure—except at that lofty perch on the American educational ziggurat, Harvard. There was more than a little groaning from Harvard students in April when the school announced that the scientist would deliver the commencement address to the school's 1600 seniors this month.

"Dr. Who?" read an editorial headline in the *Harvard Crimson*, the student newspaper, which also ran the above cartoon. "It's not that we object to scientists per se, but Varmus doesn't seem to be of the same caliber as others representative of this field," the editorial lamented. "We wish the committee had chosen someone a little more glamorous." Someone, it suggested, more like the 1995 speaker, Czech President Vaclav Havel.

For at least some students, Varmus, who devoted his speech to extolling the achievements of science, was a welcome change from the usual political leader. "It was egregious that Harvard hadn't had a scientist speak in 51 years," says biology major Steven Hetts, referring to Alexander Fleming, inventor of penicillin, who addressed the class of 1945. But scientists aren't all that sexy to the average undergraduate, says Hetts: "Harvard has a snob problem. Anything less than the President leaves a bit of a disappointment."

Physicist Leon Lederman of Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, a tireless advocate for improved science education, says the lukewarm student reaction to the prospect of being addressed by Varmus highlights a broader societal problem. "It's getting increasingly dangerous that we have a public so divorced from scientific knowledge," he says, and adds: "Look, they've graduated already, maybe they didn't want to know any more. ... When I speak at graduations I just tell jokes."

Science, Technology Medal Winners

The U.S. National Medal of Science and Technology, the nation's highest R&D prize, is supposed to be apolitical. But even the best efforts of its nominating committee couldn't remove the scent of this year's presidential campaign from the announcement last week of the 1996 winners.

The medalists were named 3 months earlier than usual at the urging of the science committee, headed by Harvard chemist Dudley Herschbach, which feared that the demands of the election might prevent the president from hosting the winners. A White House ceremony is now planned for late July. Even so, the 10 June date of the announcement was chosen to allow Commerce Secretary Mickey Cantor to personally congratulate one of the winners, James Morgan, chair and CEO of Applied Materials Inc., a Silicon Valley semiconductor manufacturer, during Cantor's visit to vote-rich California.

This year's science medalists and their fields of expertise are: Columbia University geologist Wallace Broecker (global climate change); California Institute of Technology biochemist Norman Davidson (genomic structure); Rutgers University electrical engineer James Flanagan (speech technology); University of Washington computer scientist Richard Karp (linking applied and theoretical computing problems); University of California, Los Angeles, vice chancellor and materials scientist Kumar Patel (the carbon dioxide laser); Philadelphia's Academy of Natural Sciences limnologist Ruth Patrick (biodiversity); Massachusetts Institute of Technology economist Paul Samuelson (macroeconomic policy); and University of California, Berkeley, mathematician Stephen Smale (both pure and applied work).

Technology medalists include Charles Kaman, CEO of Kaman Corp. (helicopter technology); Stephanie Louise Kwolck, formerly of DuPont Co. (high-performance aramid fibers); Peter Rose, president, Krytek Corp. (ion implantation products); and Johnson & Johnson (health care innovation).

This has been a banner year for global change specialist Broecker, who has also been chosen for the $463,000 Blue Planet Prize, awarded by the Asahi Glass Foundation.

IN DEFENSE OF DISEASE

"Disabling Science: How Negative Stereotypes of Illness Have Been Used to Promote Animal Experimentation"

—Title of a presentation on "science and ethics of vivisection," part of World Animal Awareness week held in Washington, D.C., June 20–24.