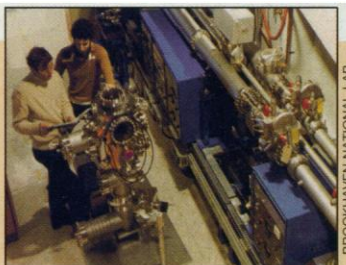


LETTERS

Missions and challenges

One reader proposes that the Department of Energy (DOE) define "missions" for its national laboratories, as has been done for the various National Institutes of Health (NIH). (At right, happier days at a DOE national laboratory, 1983.) Other readers discuss whether it would be a good idea for scientists to play by "Washington's rules" in the arena of funding and policy. "Simple changes" to the procedures for reviewing grant applications at NIH are proposed. And "a call to arms in questioning and reviewing the basic linear dose-response paradigm" for low-level radiation risks is continued.



BROOKHAVEN NATIONAL LAB

Tail Wags Dog?

It is clear from Andrew Lawler's article "DOE labs: Is evolution enough?" (News & Comment, 14 June, p. 1577) that many of the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) labs have lost their *raison d'être*, and I am uncomfortable with the idea that the labs themselves are trying to find new missions in order to survive. This is like the tail wagging the dog. Contrast the state of DOE's research missions with that of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). NIH has clearly defined, focused objectives that have wide public support, as witnessed by current increases in funding.

The DOE, at the cabinet level, should develop specific missions for its labs, and those that don't fit the DOE's mandate should be transferred to other, relevant government, academic, or private entities. Once the missions are clearly defined, only then should the question of lab closings or consolidations be addressed. The time for bold, decisive action is now. To delay is to allow the labs to wander off in diverse, aimless directions, seeking only to survive, not thrive.

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Political Scientists?

The call of Jaleh Daie for "The activist scientist" (Editorial, 24 May, p. 1081) was both compelling and repelling. I agree that individual scientists must overcome their reluctance to participate in the process of influencing resource allocation and setting science policy. I strongly disagree, however, that "in the interests of science, we must

accept the necessity of playing by Washington's rules and speaking the Washington language." Many of Washington's rules are just plain stupid and its language unintelligible. I suggest that we use our intelligence and innovational abilities to convince politicians and bureaucrats that sustained funding of research and development, along with the efficient management of natural resources, is necessary for the long-term well-being of this nation and, by extension, the world.

Technology and resource management can make all our lives more enjoyable, more profitable, more fulfilling. And sensible laws and regulations that are based on good science can benefit every citizen every day.

Let's support good legislation and be excited about science, but let's not further the nonsense of Washington politics and patronage that have gotten us into the current sorry state of affairs.

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Educating Congress about the benefits of medical research, while important, is no longer enough, nor are letters of gratitude. It is time for the research community to step up and make financial contributions to the campaigns of legislators who work on behalf of medical science. Members of Congress must raise thousands of dollars each day in order to stay in office. This is a political fact of life. If they do not raise these funds, they will not be reelected, and unknown, perhaps nonsupportive, competitors will take their places.

Dorothea C. Wilson
University of Texas Medical
Branch at Galveston,

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