NRC Matters

I write with great concern about the recent article "Is the NRC ready for reform?" by Andrew Lawler (9 May, p. 900). First, let me say that I am pleased that *Science* shows such a strong interest in the National Research Council (NRC). Dissemination of our work is crucial to its effectiveness, so we are always appreciative when our work is publicized. Nevertheless, I was disappointed in the article. I spent an hour or so talking with Lawler about a range of issues concerning the NRC—from studies that have had enormous impact on policy, to issues surrounding the Federal Advisory Committee Act, to changes within the NRC structure and how I view the future.

When Lawler asked me about changes within the NRC operations, I talked at length about measures that have been taken to cut costs and to use our resources more prudently.

Additionally, tremendous changes have been brought about by our chief operating officer, Suzanne Woolsey, in her efforts to bring more efficiency to our operations—particularly to our multimillion-dollar information services side of the house, which encompasses a complex set of functions including computers, networks, a major Internet initiative, and path-breaking ventures in electronic publishing.

I cannot comment on what others may have said, but I was disappointed that I was misquoted (see Corrections and Clarifications, 18 July, p. 301) and that the article did not reflect what I believe was the full range of my conversation with Lawler.

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I was pleased to read of the new NRC procedure starting with the appointment of principal investigators with opposing biases (A. Lawler, News & Comment, 20 June, p. 1786). This, in my opinion, is much closer than traditional NRC committee procedures to the way science is done. When, for example, scientist A publishes a discovery, he gives instructions for replication of his results (as he must). His competitor, scientist B, takes the effort to replicate, conscious of the rewards for that effort. B's rewards are much greater for finding that A was wrong than for simply replicating A's discovery. B is thus motivated toward critical examination of A's work. This is a mechanism that impels scientists to publish cautiously and to frankly acknowledge uncertainty. The advantages of providing that same frankness and caution to policy-makers (even when they don't want it) are obvious.

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Corrections and Clarifications

The mosquito shown in the photo accompanying the News & Comment article "Resurgent mosquitoes, dengue in Cuba" by Gary Taubes (11 July, p. 174) was misidentified as *Aedes aegypti*.

Letters to the Editor

Letters may be submitted by e-mail (at science_letters@aaas.org), fax (202-789-4669), or regular mail (*Science*, 1200 New York Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20005, USA). Letters are not routinely acknowledged. Full addresses, signatures, and daytime phone numbers should be included. Letters should be brief (300 words or less) and may be edited for reasons of clarity or space. They may appear in print and/or on the World Wide Web. Letter writers are not consulted before publication.