

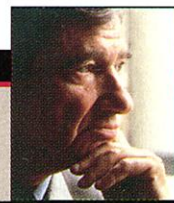
The other genome project



Ghost towns become ecology labs



Baulieu: The man behind RU-486



Also in the works are plans for Gordon and for Mildred Dresselhaus, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology engineer and the new head of the Office of Science, to host "science days" at the Sandia, Los Alamos, and Livermore weapons labs. The events, says an aide, would emphasize Gordon's belief that "security must not jeopardize DOE's science mission." That goal also underlies the new commission, to be stocked with high-profile independent scientists and security experts appointed by Richardson.

Such initiatives, however, may not be enough to win back researchers' confidence. Dorfman "is reserving judgment" but says he is "impressed with Gordon's commitment to science." A Los Alamos scientist quoted in the Baker report urged DOE officials to be guided by common sense rather than political expediency. "If you give nerds absurd guidance, it won't work," said the anonymous researcher. "Give them sensible and consistent guidance, and they'll do their best." Scientists are hoping that DOE will meet that standard. —DAVID MALAKOFF

## LABORATORY ANIMALS

### Researchers Fight Plan To Regulate Mice, Birds

The U.S. government has decided that laboratory mice are animals. This week a federal judge is expected to accept an agreement between the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and animal-welfare advocates to regulate the use of mice, rats, and birds in scientific research. The pact, which would settle a pending lawsuit, would reverse a 30-year-old policy that exempts 95% of all experimental animals from the federal government's legal definition of "animal."

Biomedical research groups are furious. They predict that new rules will drive up animal-care costs, force small colleges to stop using live animals in classes, and spawn more lawsuits. "Settling this suit without taking into account the deep concerns of the research community is a serious mistake," says Jordan Cohen, president of the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), one of several groups that fought unsuccessfully to sink the deal.

The controversy stems from a 1972 decision by the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service to exempt mice, rats, and birds from Animal Welfare Act (AWA) regulations that spell out everything from annual

inspections to cage sizes. That decision came under legal attack in 1992 after a federal judge ruled that USDA's justification for the exemption—that Congress never intended the law to apply to the three animals—was "strained and unlikely." But an appeals court later threw out the case, ruling that the Humane Society of the United States and other plaintiffs lacked standing to sue since they had not been directly harmed by USDA's action.

In 1997 the Alternatives Research & Development Foundation (ARDF) of Eden Prairie, Minnesota, sought a way around that ruling by suing on behalf of an undergraduate student who claimed she suffered emotional and aesthetic harm from working with mistreated rats in a college psychology lab. This summer, after a judge ruled that the student had standing, USDA moved to negotiate an out-of-court settlement (*Science*, 21 July, p. 377).

The decision alarmed biomedical research advocates, including AAMC, the National Association for Biomedical Research (NABR), and the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology. In a blizzard of faxes, they asked Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman to intercede, arguing that researchers should not be frozen out of negotiations. They also worried that USDA's refusal to challenge the decision could lead to dozens of new animal-rights cases.

Their pleas fell on deaf ears. On 29 September, USDA officials agreed to "initiate and complete a rulemaking on the regulation of birds, rats, and mice within a reasonable time." A jubilant John McArdle of the ARDF says that "we wanted to be certain that alternatives are considered for all laboratory animals," as required by the AWA. He also

notes that the process will allow "everyone to have their say."

Observers are divided over the practical impact of any new rules, which could take years to finalize. Animal-care experts say large breeders and research universities, which typically already meet widely used voluntary standards and other government requirements, should have little trouble complying with new regulations. But NABR has estimated that compliance could cost researchers \$280 million or more, in addition to requiring a bigger USDA budget for enforcement. Smaller teaching institutions won't be able to afford to keep rats in mazes in psychology classes or raise chicks in development courses, the

group predicts. Research funds, says Cohen, will be "frittered away on senseless and duplicative bureaucratic hoops that are driven by ideology and not reality."

Opponents have vowed to fight any changes. NABR and the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, have asked to be included in the case so that their voices can be heard. If the judge signs off, however, the groups may seek a statement from

**"We wanted to be certain that alternatives are considered for all lab animals."**

—John McArdle



**"Settling this suit without taking into account the deep concerns of the research community is a serious mistake."**

—Jordan Cohen

Congress on whether it intended to regulate mice, rats, and birds when it passed the AWA. Any final rule could also be challenged in court. "The battle will now be joined in the regulatory and legislative arenas," says Cohen.

—DAVID MALAKOFF

## NEUROSCIENCE

### A Possible Target for Better Benzodiazepines

Valium and other benzodiazepines are among the world's most prescribed drugs. They ease anxiety, relax muscles, control epilepsy, and help people sleep—but so far it's impossible to enjoy just one of the drugs' benefits without the rest of the package. Benzodiazepine users also risk some