BRAZIL

## Society Seeks Legislative Aide Fellow

**RIO DE JANEIRO**—Brasilia is far from the scientific centers of Brazil, but as the nation's capital it is the nerve center of government. The country's scientific establishment wants to stimulate the central synapses with a fellowship program that would begin to provide legislators and federal officials with the scientific expertise they need to carry out the nation's business.

The new program is the brainchild of the Brazilian Society for the Advancement of Science (SBPC), a membership organization

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**Science search.** SBPC's Glaci Zancan seeks a "special person" to work with national legislators.

with a small staff based in São Paulo. Modeled after the long-running congressional science fellowship program run by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (which publishes *Science*), it's seen as a way to inject a scientific viewpoint into political debates without the taint of personal gain.

"Yes, it's lobbying, but in the right sense," explains Aldo Malavasi, SBPC's secretary-general, using a word that is traditionally associated here with under-the-table payoffs. "The idea is to provide legislators with information that will help them make decisions that involve aspects of science and technology," says Malavasi, a researcher at the Institute of Biosciences at the University of São Paulo.

The society is hoping to find a senior scientist willing to spend a year away from research, in Brasilia, responding to legislative queries and filing quarterly reports. The concept has been endorsed by the parliament's Commission on Science and Technology, says SBPC president Glaci Zancan, noting that the commission would like to have additional expertise on hand during debates over scientific and technical issues.

The society is offering a stipend of $2000 a month and a generous travel allowance. Zancan hopes to select someone next month and have that person on the job in March, but she acknowledges that it might not be easy to find the right candidate. "We are looking for a senior researcher with a great capacity for communicating science to legislators and the public," says Zancan, a researcher with the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at the Federal University of Paraná. "It will take a special person." **–CASSIO LEITE VIEIRA**

Cassio Leite Vieira is a science writer in Rio de Janeiro.

MEDICAL RESEARCH

## NIH Kills Deal to Upgrade Heart Data

**BOSTON**—What was heralded as a new model of public-private collaboration in medical research suffered a surprise reversal last week. A controversial plan to use private capital to upgrade a valuable public database collapsed amid concerns that it would cede too much control to a for-profit company. Boston University (BU), which runs the venerable Framingham Heart Study, and the National Institutes of Health (NIH), which funds the 52-year-old effort, instead will try to put together a nonprofit consortium in the coming year to modernize the massive database.

The decision, announced in a 26 December joint letter to the study participants, deals a mortal blow to Framingham Genomic Medicine Inc. of Framingham, Massachusetts, which was raising money to organize, digitize, and analyze the Framingham data. The company planned to repackage and sell data to the pharmaceutical industry (*Science*, 30 June 2000, p. 2301). The NIH decision also is a disappointment to BU, which was instrumental in forming the company. But the participants knew it would be risky: "There just wasn't a precedent for doing this," says Aram Chobanian, dean of BU's medical school.

The study has monitored the health of more than 10,000 people in the small town of Framingham during the last half-century, and it offers a treasure trove of data for researchers. But much of it is stored in boxes or file cabinets. NIH has been reluctant to put up the millions of dollars needed to update and upgrade the database, so BU hit upon the idea of getting a private company to do it instead. Its proposal, announced to the Framingham participants in April, raised tough ethical issues, ranging from questions about how outside scientists would get access to the revamped data to whether personal medical data collected with public money should be sold to private companies.

Ultimately, negotiations between BU and the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute foundered on how to balance scientific access to the data with the company's proprietary interests. "BU was under some pressure from the company to reach an

## ScienceScope

**Defining Animals** Biomedical science backers and animal-welfare groups are preparing for a congressional scuffle over research rodents. Last year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture moved to regulate the use of **laboratory rats, mice, and birds,** which constitute 95% of all research animals, after activists won a lawsuit. But Congress temporarily blocked the rules at the behest of some research groups, who said regulation would be too expensive (*Science*, 13 October 2000, p. 243). Animal-welfare groups are mobilizing against a push to permanently block the rules. Predicts one congressional aide: "The fur is going to fly."

**Help Wanted** France is looking for a **new director of research.** The main man behind the scenes at the French research ministry, geophysicist Vincent Courtillot, says he plans to quit soon. In a note to his staff, Courtillot explained that after nearly 4 years of "passion, joy, and stress," it was time to return to his Paris laboratory at the Institute of the Physics of the Globe.

**Forecast: Cloudy** More fights over food and climate are coming. Last month, an expert panel formed by the European Union and the U.S. recommended stricter regulation of **genetically modified (GM) foods,** and its report could help make GM food safety reviews mandatory, rather than voluntary, at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. The group also urged labeling GM foods, but it's unlikely the Bush Administration will go along. Still, market forces may rule: Already, some U.S. grain processors are separating crops so they can sell non-GM products in Europe.

Meanwhile, the new Administration is also unlikely to support international efforts to put teeth into the Kyoto global warming treaty. Negotiations collapsed last year after the U.S. objected to demands by European nations to stiffen emissions-trading requirements.

**Boosting Science** In Japan, science planners will launch **a drive to raise government R&D spending** from 0.7% of gross domestic product to 1%. The increase, which an advisory group calculates would cost about $218 billion over 5 years, would bring Japan's public-sector spending more in line with that of the U.S. and Europe, says Hiroo Imura, a key government science adviser. The target has not been formally adopted by the government, says Imura, "but we're hopeful."

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