

AMA CEO Plays Hardball

The chief of the American Medical Association (AMA) dropped a bombshell at the annual delegates' meeting in Chicago last week by announcing that he is suing the AMA Board of Trustees. CEO Ratcliffe Anderson claims the board has violated his contract in the course of a dispute harking back to the notorious Sunbeam episode of 1997. In a press release Anderson dubbed it "Sunbeam II."

Anderson, a former Air Force surgeon general, came aboard in 1998 as part of a general housecleaning after AMA backed out of a much-criticized agreement to let Sunbeam use its name commercially. At the time, an internal report by AMA lawyer Michael Ile exonerated the board from any knowledge of the agreement. Ile was subsequently named general counsel.

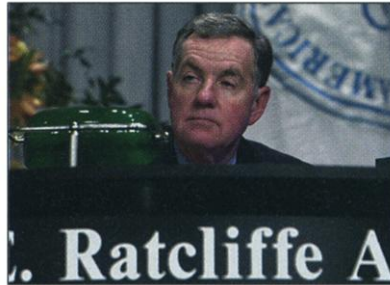
In his 11 June complaint

filed in Cook County Circuit Court, Anderson claims that Ile's report failed to mention a 1997 internal message to the board alluding to the Sunbeam plan. He goes on to say that last fall he wanted to fire Ile for management of a money-losing real estate deal. But the board wouldn't let him, he says, instead arranging for Ile's resignation and a severance package—and, in violation of Anderson's contract, taking over authority for hiring the next counsel. The board has effectively terminated his contract, Anderson says, and he is asking for 3 years of compensation.

The suit resulted from a "growing belief ... that the Sunbeam fiasco ... was not an aberration for certain members" of the board, Anderson said in his press release. In response, the

board issued a statement saying it had not violated Anderson's contract and criticizing him for springing his suit on it in the middle of its June meeting.

Last week Anderson was still at the AMA helm. "I'm going to stick around until they tell me:



Anderson at delegates' meeting.

'Don't stick around anymore,' " he told reporters. Peter Warren, a spokesperson for the California Medical Association, says the affair is "sad" and raises questions about the ability of people at AMA to "work out their differences in a professional manner. ... It's a mess."

Walk Before You Talk

Studying laughter can lead to surprising new insights: One is that humans must have started walking upright before they developed speech, a developmental neuroscientist related last week at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Society in Toronto. A quadruped's breathing apparatus, it seems, would make it impossible to talk and run at the same time.

Most laughter research is done on humor, said Robert Provine of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. But "philosophers and psychologists have been barking up the wrong tree for 2000 years," because, in fact, laughter is social

behavior. By videotaping spontaneous social situations, like college students yukking it up under a tree, Provine says he has shown that "most laughter is not about jokes but is about social relationships and play." This insight led him to Yerkes Regional Primate Research Center in Atlanta, where he observed what he believes is the evolutionary precursor of human laughter: the "ritualized panting" of chimps during play.



Chuckling chimp.

Chimps have to take a separate breath for each yuk, Provine notes, while humans can "ha-ha" all in one expiration. He also noted that when quadrupeds run they have to take

a breath with every step, which makes it impossible to develop the sophisticated respiratory control necessary for speech. Thus, he says, bipedality, which allowed "the redirection of breathing in the service of soundmaking," is "the key event in human evolution necessary for the emergence of speech." He calls this, naturally enough, the "Walkie-Talkie Theory."

Philip Lieberman of Brown University in Providence, who studies the evolution of the human vocal tract, says Provine's theory fits with his own research. Brain structures that regulate bipedal locomotion are also essential in regulating speech, he says. Thus "bipedal locomotion may have been the initial selective pressure for the elaboration of [brain] structures that are essential for speech and syntax."

Senate Gives Nod to Creationists

There seems to be something about creationism—now available in a more sophisticated version, intelligent design (ID)—that politicians just can't resist. On 13 June, the Senate overwhelmingly endorsed an amendment to an education bill that defenders of evolution say will be used to promote creationism. The problem, says Eugenie Scott, who directs the National Center for Science Education in Oakland, California, is that the amendment gives the impression that evolution is a scientifically controversial theory—which it's not.

The hubbub centers on language, from Senator Rick Santorum (R-PA), that states, "where biological evolution is taught, the curriculum should help students understand why this subject generates so much continuing controversy. ..."

Santorum presented the amendment as a measure endorsing "intellectual freedom ... it says there should be freedom to discuss and air good scientific debate within the classroom." The Senate approved it 91 to 8.

Were members asleep during the vote? "The senator essentially took the language at face value, as, I think it's pretty clear from the vote, so did everyone else," says a spokesperson for science-friendly Senator Joe Lieberman (D-CT).

The amendment reportedly was drafted with the help of an ID advocate. Scott says that its passage will allow ID believers to say they have the Senate's endorsement. Indeed, the Discovery Institute, a think tank in Seattle, Washington, that promotes ID, sent out a triumphant e-mail, saying "the Darwinian monopoly on public science education, and perhaps on the biological sciences in general, is ending."