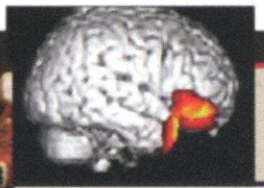


NIH INSTITUTE VACANCIES

Institute	Permanent director	Tenure ends
Alcohol Abuse	Enoch Gordis	December 2001
Biomedical Imaging	—	(new institute)
Cancer	Richard Klausner	September 2001
Drug Abuse	Alan Leshner	November 2001
Mental Health	Steven Hyman	December 2001
Neurology	Gerald Fischbach	December 2000
NIH	Harold Varmus	December 1999

To academe. NIMH's Hyman to be Harvard provost.

eties for Experimental Biology (FASEB), agrees. It's difficult for any acting director to recruit subordinates, Rich says. "I believe it will be difficult to fill the institute directorships [at NIH] with permanent persons until the most senior position, the NIH director, is filled," he says. "The longer this goes on—with departures pending—the more urgent it will become" to find an NIH chief.

A group of prominent biologists made a plea for a new "permanent leader" at NIH to Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Tommy Thompson in a 5 October letter, according to Maxine Singer, president of the Carnegie Institution of Washington. The cosigners included, among others, Nobelist Paul Berg of Stanford University, genome scientist Eric Lander of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Thomas Pollard of the Salk Institute for Biological Studies.

In private, many scientists are more outspoken. The head of a major research university, who asked not to be identified, said last week that he was "very concerned" about the NIH and its biggest component, the $4 billion National Cancer Institute (NCI). Currently, NCI deputy director Alan Rabson, Kirschstein's husband, is serving as acting director. The White House is rumored to be recruiting a new NCI chief from Texas without input from NIH or the broader biomedical community (see ScienceScope, p. 973).

Earlier this year, according to Alberts, officials at the White House and HHS, of which NIH is part, consulted NAS about federal jobs. But the dialog has tapered off, he says. The terrorist attacks intervened, Alberts thinks, but he also believes the response to those attacks makes it clear that the Administration needs "better access to top scientists."

NIH acting director Kirschstein brushes aside worries about the recruitment of new staff. The spate of recent NIH resignations arrived at the same time by "coincidence," she says, and they are part of the normal turnover of government staff. "I don't think anyone's unhappy with the decisions I've made," she adds, and she says she has the "full confidence" of HHS Secretary Thompson. As for the concern that she's being excluded from helping with the search for the next cancer chief, Kirschstein acknowledges that she hasn't discussed the search with Administration higher-ups. The appointment, she notes, is the president's prerogative.

Klausner and Hyman had once been widely viewed as possible internal candidates for the NIH directorship, as has Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. Fauci declined to comment on rumors that he is now the leading candidate. **–ELIOT MARSHALL**

BIOTERRORISM

New Law May Force Labs To Screen Workers

Molecular biologist Julia Hilliard has spent the past 20 years studying deadly viruses, including the monkey-borne B virus that can destroy a person's brain. But if the Georgia State University academic wants to keep working with such potential bioweapons, she may soon need to prove that she's not crazy, a convict, or using illegal drugs.

Last week, President George W. Bush signed into law an antiterrorism measure that gives spy and police agencies broad new investigative powers. It also bars several classes of people—including felons, the mentally ill, and those from nations deemed "terrorist" by the U.S. government—from possessing certain viruses, toxins, and microorganisms that could be used as weapons. Lawbreakers would face up to 10 years in jail. The new rules may force universities to conduct criminal background checks and drug tests on thousands of scientists and students who, like Hilliard, study the B virus, anthrax, and about 40 other deadly agents (see table, p. 973).

Many researchers say they welcome the added security if it keeps research materials from falling into the wrong hands. "It's overdue," says Hilliard. But some scientists worry that the recent anthrax attacks may cause Congress to take additional steps—including barring non-U.S. citizens from handling certain materials—that could hinder academic research.

It is unclear how many researchers will be affected by the new law. Up to 300 universities—and several dozen more state and federal government labs—currently handle material classified as "select agents" by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, according to Ron Atlas of the University of Louisville in Kentucky. He predicts that it will have "minimal" impact because many facilities already screen workers doing classified work for the military or conducting federally funded drug studies. But other university labs, including Hilliard's 16-person Biosafety Level 4 facility in Atlanta, currently don't require such measures. "It is probably the weakest link in our [security] program," Hilliard says.

John Collier, who studies anthrax at Harvard University, says he "could live with" a background check, which security companies say can cost from $20 to thousands of dollars per person. But he fears that having to screen every worker in his lab "could create a huge bureaucracy" without significantly improving security. Anthrax and other potential bioweapons can be cultured from natural sources, he and others note, and don't neces-

Controlled substance. New law sets jail terms for illegal possession of biological agents like Marburg virus.

CREDITS (LEFT TO RIGHT): RICK KOZAK; CDC

WHAT'S ON THE WATCH LIST

VIRUSES

Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever virus, Eastern equine encephalitis virus, Ebola viruses, equine morbillivirus, Lassa fever virus, Marburg virus, Rift Valley fever virus, South American hemorrhagic fever viruses (Junin, Machupo, Sabia, Flexal, Guanarito), tick-borne encephalitis complex viruses, *Variola major* virus (smallpox virus), Venezuelan equine encephalitis virus, viruses causing hantavirus pulmonary syndrome, yellow fever virus

BACTERIA

Bacillus anthracis, Brucella abortus, Brucella melitensis, Brucella suis, Burkholderia (Pseudomonas) mallei, Burkholderia (Pseudomonas) pseudomallei, Clostridium botulinum, Francisella tularensis, Yersinia pestis

RICKETTSIAE

Coxiella burnetii, Rickettsia prowazekii, Rickettsia rickettsii

FUNGI

Coccidioides immitis

TOXINS

Abrin, aflatoxins, botulinum toxins, *Clostridium perfringens* epsilon toxin, conotoxins, diacetoxyscirpenol, ricin, saxitoxin, shigatoxin, *Staphylococcal enterotoxins*, tetrodotoxin, T-2 toxin

sarily have to be filched from a lab.

A proposal to bar nonresident aliens from possessing a select agent also troubles some researchers. "People we may need to work with—including Canadian and British research—could be affected by this," says Atlas, who was expected to testify this week before a Senate committee on behalf of the American Society for Microbiology (ASM). He notes that the bill (H.R. 3160), which passed the House last week, allows the Secretary of Health and Human Services to issue waivers but worries that the process could be "cumbersome."

One idea getting better reviews is to create a national registry to track select agents. Bioterrorism experts have long urged Congress to require researchers who possess deadly materials to register their collections with CDC, and the agency has been embarrassed by its inability to specify how many U.S. labs might have produced the anthrax that has contaminated U.S. mailrooms. A 1996 law requiring the CDC to license laboratories that ship or receive select agents didn't include an inventory reporting requirement; it also exempted researchers who had stockpiled strains in freezers but weren't planning to share them. The current attacks, says ASM's Janet Schumaker, make it prudent "to reexamine all the issues surrounding possession."

–DAVID MALAKOFF AND MARTIN ENSERINK

U.S. SCIENCE POLICY

Marburger Shakes Up White House Office

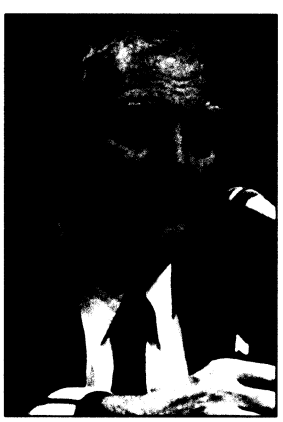
After winning unanimous Senate confirmation last week, presidential science advisor John Marburger has moved swiftly to make radical changes to his office.

Marburger has eliminated two of the four senior positions within the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) that he heads, subsuming environmental matters and national security under either science or technology. "I felt the office was too fragmented to be effective, and I wanted to have more direct control," says Marburger.

The changes have unsettled some members of the science and technology community. Eliminating the national security position "is a big blow" to forging links to the powerful National Security Council, says one former OSTP official. The need to incorporate science into the burgeoning war on terrorism suggests that Marburger "is moving in the wrong direction," says Al Teich, head of science and policy at the American Association for the Advancement of Science (which publishes *Science*). Dropping the environmental job, Teich adds, is a "surprising move" given the importance of global warming and related issues.

Several science policy analysts and former OSTP officials also expressed concern about the nomination of Richard Russell, now OSTP chief of staff, to serve as technology chief. Russell worked for nearly 7 years on the House Science Committee, but unlike most of his forerunners, he does not have an advanced scientific degree or extensive experience in industry. Russell declined comment, but Marburger acknowledges that researchers have questioned the choice.

"This is not an academic appointment, and dealing with academic aspects of technology is only part of what we do," says Marburger, the former director of Brookhaven National Laboratory in Upton, New



CREDIT: MARTY KATZ

In charge. John Marburger says new OSTP structure gives him "more direct control."

ScienceScope

NIH Grapevine Cancer researchers are circulating a rumor that President George W. Bush favors Andrew C. von Eschenbach to be the next director of the National Cancer Institute (NCI). Von Eschenbach, a leader in prostate cancer treatment and a clinical researcher at the University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, is close to the Bush family and has been active in the American Cancer Society. Ruth Kirschstein, acting director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), says she has no information about the search for a new NCI director, although other NIH leaders say the White House has already made its decision. Von Eschenbach declined comment through a spokesperson.

PAC 'Em In Spurred by the recent creation of a political action committee designed to fund only Republicans (*Science*, 7 September, p. 1747), three Washington science advocates last week set up their own—but this one will be fervently nonpartisan. Called U.S. Science (www.us-science.org), the organization will contribute cash to U.S. political candidates who place a high priority on government support for science.

The first order of business will be to set up an advisory board of eminent science supporters who will decide who gets donations, says Kevin Marvel, an American Astronomical Society spokesperson who is one of the three co-directors. "If there is a referee-type process, then scientists will be willing to give money," he says. Once the board is in place, they intend to go after contributions. He adds that while they applaud SciPAC, the Republican-only group, "we felt it is more important to broaden support for science."

Brain Gain The Royal Society of London is launching a program designed to lure top postdoctoral researchers from the United States to the United Kingdom. Beginning in June 2002, it will fund 10 American postdocs to work in leading British laboratories for up to 3 years.

The program, the product of years of discussion with the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, is aimed at sharing talent between the two nations. "We want to do it in the context of brain circulation, not just brain gain," says Sir Brian Heap, vice president and foreign secretary of the society. Stipends will be commensurate with those available in the U.S., he says. Postdocs interested in making the jump must apply by next February. Full details available at www.royalsoc.ac.uk/funding/ig_fr.htm.