subscriptions of essential scientific journals because of high costs.

I wish to mention the case of Venezuelan universities, which have suffered drastically because of currency control and continuous devaluation since 1983. Seventeen of Venezuela's 37 universities are public, with a total enrollment of 528,209 students, of which 78.56% are in public-sector institutions such as Universidad Central de Venezuela and Universidad de Oriente (Oficina de Planificación del Sector Universitario, 1998; www.cnu.gov.ve). These universities used to subscribe to over 9000 journals before 1983. This number has dropped in all but a few institutions. To solve this problem, the University Library Association constituted a consortium in 1999 to negotiate with the major American and European distributors on the basis of open competition. The results have been substantial discounts in subscription rates and other benefits, such as door-to-door delivery, free online access to limited journals, and greater availability of electronic databases.

Currently, 11 of the 37 public universities subscribe to over 7000 scientific journals at a cost of $12 million per year. This has been possible because of the negotiations of the consortium. Not all of Venezuela's universities are members of the consortium, but its membership is growing. As it grows, we hope to obtain an even better deal from the suppliers and publishers.

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Italy's Annual AIDS Budget Appropriation

IN HIS ARTICLE "DELAYS JEOPARDIZE ITALIAN program" (News of the Week, 8 March, p. 1811), Michael Balter writes that some Italian investigators stated that money for AIDS research has been severely cut for 2002. This is not true, since the Italian government has decided to finance AIDS research projects for 2002 with 15,000,000 Euros. The problem, therefore, is the financing of projects for 2003 and on. For this reason, I have personally taken the responsibility of refinancing AIDS research projects at the same level as 2002 for future years.

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Response

UNTIL MY STORY WAS PUBLISHED, LEADING Italian AIDS researchers—including members of the National AIDS Commission, on which Sirchia sits—had received no word from the government on the 2002 AIDS research budget. Unfortunately, Sirchia and his staff did not respond to repeated requests from *Science* to clarify the situation before our press deadline.

MICHAEL BALTER

A "Water" Model for Nuclei Still Holds Water

RECENT EVIDENCE FOR A LIQUID-TO-GAS phase transition in hot nuclei, a process analagous to the vaporization of water (*1*–*4*), is described by Charles Seife in his article "Atom smasher probes realm of nuclear 'Gas'" (News of the Week, 25 Jan., p. 603) The data were obtained at the Brookhaven AGS accelerator by bombarding gold nuclei with highly energetic protons and pions and measuring the multiple subatomic fragments emitted in each collision with the Indiana Silicon Sphere (ISiS) detector array.

A critical component of this research that Seife did not mention in his article was theoretical work showing that the observed number and size distributions of the fragments formed in these collisions matched the predictions of general statistical theories for a phase transition. James B. Elliott at Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory and Wolfgang Bauer at Michigan State University, along with their colleagues, were responsible for performing these calculations, which appear to provide strong support for the phase transition interpretation.

The ISiS studies are part of a broad international effort to understand the nuclear phase transition. Among these programs are those at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (EOS), Texas A&M (NIMROD), GSI in Germany (ALADIN), GANIL in France (INDRA), and Michigan State University, all of which appear to be reaching similar conclusions.

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Letters to the Editor

Letters (~300 words) discuss material published in *Science* in the previous 6 months or issues of general interest. They can be submitted by e-mail (science_letters@aaas.org), the Web (www.letter2science.org), or regular mail (1200 New York Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20005, USA). Letters are not acknowledged upon receipt, nor are authors generally consulted before publication. Whether published in full or in part, letters are subject to editing for clarity and space.