

I'll acknowledge the alleged consistency and rationality of the SI metric system when its advocates measure clock and calendar time with a decimal system, and base their "year number one" on something other than religion or mythology. I'll acknowledge the universal advantages of decimal notation when they denote camera *f*-stops and shutter speeds decimally, carry no U.S. money but pennies, dimes, and \$1, \$10, \$100 bills, and divide the earth's perimeter into 100 degrees of latitude and longitude.

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### Cystic Fibrosis Research

Leslie Roberts' article "Cystic fibrosis pilot projects go begging" (News & Comment, 23 Nov., p. 1076) suggests that the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) acted inappropriately with respect to cystic fibrosis (CF) research. As director of the NIDDK, the lead institute at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for CF research, I strongly disagree with the impressions given by this article, and offer the following points as a corrective.

1) Identifying the CF gene was always of the highest priority to the NIDDK. At the end of 1986, when we were receiving an insufficient number of applications in this area, we issued a Request for Applications (RFA) on genetic and metabolic defects underlying CF. While the applications were undergoing peer review, false rumors circulated that the CF gene had already been found. Because we were concerned that these unsubstantiated rumors might cause a loss of research momentum in the search for the gene, our program staff requested that our National Advisory Council vote high program relevance for certain applications aimed at identification of the CF gene. As a result, four such applications were funded on 1 January 1988, and two of the grantees, Lap-Chee Tsui and Francis Collins, were ultimately successful in identifying the CF gene. Moreover, we have supported Tsui continuously since 1985, so I am at a loss to understand the statement in the article that NIH stopped supporting research to find the cystic fibrosis gene, under the mistaken impression that it had been found."

2) NIDDK funding decisions with respect to cystic fibrosis research are based on considerations of scientific and technical

merit and program relevance and not on ideological issues. The reason that the NIDDK did not fund a recent research grant application for a pilot project for genetic screening in cystic fibrosis was that the application was given a poor priority in the NIH peer review process. It is not correct, as suggested by the article, that the possible relationship of genetic screening to the abortion issue played any role whatsoever in the decisions we have made regarding the funding of CF research. In fact, NIH sponsorship of a major conference on genetic screening in March 1990 was indicative of our commitment to pursue the most scientifically responsible course following the discovery of the CF gene. Our goal was to ensure that technical information about genetic screening and recommendations for scientifically appropriate use of genetic tests were disseminated in a timely and meaningful way.

The NIDDK has been responsive to the statement of the advisory panel on population screening for the cystic fibrosis gene, which we convened in March 1990. However, we cannot follow every recommendation we receive from outside advisory groups, particularly if those recommendations conflict with the findings of the peer review system. In this case, we believe that pilot genetic screening projects must compete for funding with all research project applications on the basis of scientific and technical merit.

In these times of limited resources, the NIDDK can only issue research solicitations in areas of the highest scientific opportunity and promise. Reflecting our strong commitment to CF research, in 1990 we funded grants in response to a solicitation aimed at furthering research to develop gene therapy for inherited metabolic diseases. In 1991, we will fund grants in response to a special solicitation for applications aimed at elucidating the pathogenesis of CF, with a goal of developing treatments directed at the basic defect.

We remain dedicated to CF research and to the rapid and full exploitation of the impressive discovery of the CF gene. As in the past, we will continue to work closely with investigators in the CF research community toward this end, and particularly with the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation in what has been an extraordinarily productive collaboration during the past decade.

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### ACT Questions

A News briefing in the 26 October 1990 issue of *Science* (p. 503) might incorrectly lead readers to conclude that American College Testing (ACT) has a policy that precludes the use of materials on animal research in its tests. ACT has no such policy. To the contrary, we regularly include such materials when it is appropriate to do so.

The briefing references the ACT Assessment, a comprehensive program completed each year by approximately 1 million high school students as part of the college admissions process. The tests that comprise the ACT Assessment are curriculum-based; they measure skills that are important to success in entry-level college studies.

Because materials involving animal research are an integral part of the high school science curriculum, the ACT Assessment regularly includes questions that refer to animal research on its Science Reasoning Test. Such materials also appear regularly in the sample test materials that ACT provides free to students.

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### Cool Heads

As a bald college professor, I should like to add to the frivolity that accretes to Ann Gibbons' Research News article about Dean Falk's theory that a special cooling system enabled the human brain to evolve ("Did cooler heads prevail?" 7 Dec., p. 1338). At long last I understand why the popular mind considers intellectuals to be eggheads. Eggheads have bare scalps, bare scalps facilitate the cooling of the brain, cool brains facilitate thinking, thinking facilitates being called an intellectual. Ergo!

It took a bald college professor to derive this syllogism.

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*Erratum:* In Virginia Morell's Research News article "New light on writing in the Americas" (18 Jan., p. 268), the illustrations on page 268 should have been credited to George Stuart of the National Geographic Society.