

Post-Mortem on Storb Resignation

Of the recent controversies at NIH's Office of Scientific Integrity, few have been as murky as the flap over University of Chicago immunologist Ursula Storb. Early this summer, Storb was asked to resign from the scientific panel advising OSI in its investigation of Tufts immunologist Thereza Imanishi-Kari. The reason: OSI learned that Storb had once written a letter of recommendation for Imanishi-Kari. Storb refused, and OSI director Jules Hallum later withdrew the OSI request (*Science*, 5 July, p. 24).

Science has now obtained Storb's letter and internal OSI documents that suggest Storb did nothing more than follow a common academic practice—that of writing a recommendation for a researcher in the same field, whether known personally or not, based almost entirely on published work. Specifically, Storb's 12 May 1986 letter, written at the request of Tufts pathology department chairman Martin Flax, praises Imanishi-Kari as a "well known investigator in the area of cellular immunology." Storb did refer to the very 25 April 1986 paper in *Cell* that she was later called on to help investigate, citing Imanishi-Kari's contribution to that paper as "important work" that "led to the interesting observation of idiotype network regulation" in transgenic mice. But at the time, it is unlikely she would have known about the controversy because her letter was written just 5 days after Margot O'Toole discovered the infamous "17 pages" of laboratory notes that led her to challenge the paper.

Why was the staff of OSI so concerned

about her presence on the panel that they unanimously agreed to ask her to resign? A review of OSI memoranda, draft letters, and conversation notes makes it clear that OSI officials were never concerned that Storb was actually compromised by a personal relationship with Imanishi-Kari, but rather were eager to uphold "the appearance of complete objectivity" in the investigation—a distinction not publicly articulated when Storb was asked to resign.

To this day, former OSI investigator Suzanne Hadley maintains that the office correctly asked for Storb's resignation. OSI director Hallum merely says he found it "incongruous" that OSI would ask Storb to resign, yet keep her contributions to the investigation's report. And he adds that at no time did NIH director Bernadine Healy "force" him to reverse the decision, although he does say that "she made her views explicitly known."

For her part, Healy argues that she actually had to push OSI to find out whether Storb's letter represented an actual conflict of interest, rather than just an appearance: "I said, 'Is there a real conflict of interest?' They said, 'Well, we don't think so.' I said, 'What are the facts? Do they have a personal relationship? Do they vacation together? Are they related? Have they ever been mentor-mentee? Has there ever been anything that would suggest that there was a less than an objective relationship?' 'Oh, we didn't ask that.' I said, 'How can you ask someone to step down from a panel? Maybe there's a real conflict of interest we need to worry

about.' 'We don't think it exists.' 'Well, why don't you find out?'"

After speaking again with Storb, Hadley wrote a 3 June memo to Healy, explaining that she had found "no professional collaboration nor other professional or personal relationship between Dr. Storb and Dr. Imanishi-Kari." Two weeks later, the decision was reversed. ■ DAVID P. HAMILTON

A Reprieve for MIT's Magnet Lab

This time last year, things looked bad for the Francis Bitter National Magnet Laboratory at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The National Science Foundation (NSF) had just rejected an MIT proposal to build a new national magnet laboratory, instead awarding the 5-year, \$60-million grant to Florida State University in a controversial decision that overruled two layers of peer review and, incidentally, called for phasing out research at the Bitter lab (*Science*, 21 September 1990, p. 1321). Because the Florida facility would be built from scratch, leading to years of hiatus in the U.S. high-field magnet program, Bitter lab director J. David Litster complained that the NSF decision represented a "serious risk to the future of high magnetic field research in the U.S." And users of the Bitter lab hung in limbo, anxious to learn whether they would have to take their research to magnet laboratories in France or Japan while the Florida lab ramped up.

NSF finally relieved many of those worries on 9 August, when it announced its intention to fund work at the Bitter lab through September 1995 to the tune of \$23 million. Even Florida State is helping out. It will kick in an additional \$4 million from its own NSF grant as part of a \$9-million effort at MIT to develop a 45-tesla magnet that will later be transferred to the Florida lab. The NSF announcement appears to have gladdened Litster's heart. "With these funds, the [Bitter] magnet lab will continue to be a center for high field research and technology for the next 4 years," he said in a statement released by MIT. "This [arrangement] will maintain the U.S. world leadership."

Users of the Bitter lab appear relieved by the NSF decision. "This is good news for the magnet lab and for the user community," says C.D. Graham, Jr., a University of Pennsylvania materials engineer. The additional funding also appears likely to retard an anticipated drain of Bitter's technical support staff, he says. ■ D.P.H.

A Changing of the Guards

Look for some new faces in high-ranking science jobs in Washington in the next few weeks. At the National Science Foundation (NSF), electrical engineer Joseph Bordogna will take over the Engineering directorate on 1 September, replacing John A. White, who goes to the Georgia Institute of Technology as the new dean of engineering. Bordogna has been the dean of the School of Engineering and Applied Science at the University of Pennsylvania since 1988.

A month later, A. Nico Habermann will become head of the Computer and Information Science and Engineering (CISE) directorate, replacing William Wulf, who left for the University of Virginia in May 1990. Habermann has been dean of the School of Computer Science at Carnegie-Mellon University since 1988. CISE has been one of the fastest growing directorates within the agency—its budget is slated to rise to \$229 million in 1992, an increase of more than 23%.

Finally, over at the Institute of Medicine, word comes that Stuart Bondurant, dean of the medical school at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, will take the reins as acting president starting 1 September. The search goes on for a permanent replacement for Samuel O. Thier, who is leaving IOM to become president of Brandeis University. ■ J.P.