

Bernadine Healy: A New Leadership Style at NIH

Her willingness to spar with John Dingell and her outspokenness are refreshing, but are they politically hazardous?

"DECISIONS GET YOU IN TROUBLE," SAYS Bernadine Healy, director of the National Institutes of Health. "If I am prepared to exercise my authority and, I think, my responsibility, to NIH and the scientific community to make decisions, then I'm going to get hit."

Just 4 months into her tenure as NIH director, Healy is getting hit. Last month, she received a public dressing down—to which she responded in kind—from Representative John Dingell (D-MI) for what Dingell saw as improper interference in the investigation of the so-called Baltimore and Gallo cases (*Science*, 9 August, p. 618). Meanwhile, elements within the university lobbying community are upset because she decided to take an aggressive stand in trying to curb indirect costs. And some Republi-

cans in Congress and the Cabinet have blasted her decision to support a federally funded survey of teenage sexual behavior.

Healy says these public battles are hard on her. "My style is not confrontational," she insists. "I don't enjoy confrontations, I like to prevent them." That may well be true. But to speak with Bernadine Healy, as *Science* did for 2 hours just a week after her public spat with Dingell, you get the feeling that while she may not like confrontations, Healy will never shy away from them—especially when she feels one of her strongly held principles is being challenged. And if that means sparring with one of the most powerful members of Congress, or publicly disagreeing with her political bosses over biomedical policy, or telling grumpy intramural scientists they don't know how good

they have it—well, so be it.

The scientific community wanted a strong leader at the top of NIH, and now they've got one. The confident, even brash style of the New York-born cardiologist marks a dramatic departure from the more understated manner of her predecessor, James Wyngaarden. In fact, outspoken leadership in the federal scientific bureaucracy is something of a rarity: Only former National Science Foundation director Erich Bloch and perhaps former presidential science adviser George "Jay" Keyworth have matched her willingness to go public with controversial positions.

To many longtime observers of the Washington scene, it's a refreshing change. When Healy took on Dingell, "her standing in the scientific community probably went up substantially, and I would guess in the university community more generally," says Robert M. Rosenzweig, president of the Association of American Universities. Social scientists were also overjoyed that she stood firm on the scientific merit of the teen sex survey, despite being overruled by Health and Human Services Secretary Louis Sullivan. But Healy will need more than praise from scientists to win political battles in Washington, and some old hands such as Rosenzweig are concerned that her aggressive style could ultimately undermine her effectiveness. "We haven't seen that from NIH for a long time," he says. "That's not to say whether it's good or bad. That remains to be seen. But it's different."

In a wide-ranging interview with members of the *Science* news staff, Healy provided an at-times extraordinarily frank view of her intentions. In general, she is confident of her skills in navigating her way through Washington's political shoals. "I think I am as politically sensitive as any NIH director has ever been," she told *Science*. Her run-in with Dingell and her own statements about her job give some clues about her navigational tactics.

Deciding when to fight

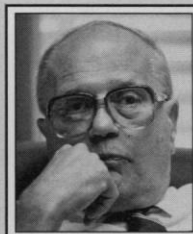
Picking your battles is a Washington art form and, in letting herself get drawn into a public confrontation with the powerful and tenacious Dingell, Healy could be faulted for choosing the wrong moment to take a stand. She argues the confrontation was not her idea: "I didn't think I was taking him on, I thought he was taking me on." In fact, prior to the hearing, Healy had made sev-

Dingell—or Healy—on Misconduct?

Representative John Dingell (D-MI) and NIH Director Bernadine Healy may be at odds over the management of the Office of Scientific Integrity, but their criticisms of misconduct investigations often sound alike. The following quotes are from statements by Dingell and an interview Healy gave to *Science*. Guess who said what.



Healy



Dingell

Check one

- "The apparent unwillingness on the part of the scientific community to deal promptly and effectively with allegations of misconduct is unfair to both the accuser and to the accused. Even more important, it impairs the conduct of research, its present and future value to other scientists, and its benefits to the public."
- "There was no resolve to solve [the timeliness problem]. It's not just that cases went from 3 months to 4 months, they went from 3 months to 3 years."
- "I honestly think that if the scientific community had experienced what I have experienced...the scientific community would be on bended knee to say 'get it out of NIH' if this is the best [NIH] can do."
- "The taxpayers of this country spend billions of dollars supporting science in all areas. It is not too much for them to expect the monies that are spent from their tax revenues are spent well, are spent honorably, and are spent on...the active and the vigorous pursuit of truth."
- "I don't think [NIH has] dealt adequately with protecting public money."
- "I don't think it's useful to talk about an argument is it five cases [of scientific misconduct], is it 10 cases, is it 50 cases? That's not the issue. One case erodes confidence."

	Healy	Dingell
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Answers: Dingell: 1, 4; Healy: 2, 3, 5, 6

eral attempts to avoid just such a clash by meeting with Dingell in non-confrontational circumstances. "I was never able to get an appointment," she recalled.

But Healy persisted. She knew that Dingell would be at a dinner for the Children's Inn, a special facility on the NIH campus for sick children and their families, because his wife, Debbie, was heavily involved in the project. At the dinner, Healy managed to get Dingell

and let me tell you, that is brutal—four-letter words, yelling, screaming, insults." She was also incensed that the Dingell staff asked others whether Healy had any potentially compromising relationships with scientists under investigation. "They were interrogating [deputy director William] Raub as to whether I had a personal relationship with Dr. Baltimore," she says. "Now how slimy is that one?"

But Healy may be betraying a thin skin. Most of Washington is used to the aggressive tactics of Dingell's staff, and while they may not like them, they shrug them off. "We were not abusive. We were vigorous," insists a member of the subcommittee's Republican staff who participated in the interview. "There were probably a few four-letter words used, but they were what I call 'meaningless intensifiers,' and none was directed at her." A Democratic staffer puts it less charitably: "She's just puling."

Particularly because Dingell isn't likely to choose Healy over his trusted staff, most observers doubt we've seen the last of the Dingell-Healy face-off. "That committee has a long memory and lots of resources," says Rosenzweig, "and I think that they'll be looking at her."

Standing on scientific principle

Keyworth got away with controversial outbursts in part because he was protected by White House chief of staff Edwin Meese. So if Healy is going to take on congressmen, will she be supported by her superiors? That question takes on extra piquancy considering the fact that after only 4 months on the job she has already demonstrated a willingness to disagree publicly with the Administration on matters of biomedical policy when she feels that scientific principles are at stake. For example, in her confirmation hearing she was quite forthright about stating her personal belief that it was appropriate for the federal government to support research using fetal tissue from induced abortions, despite the fact that the Administration had explicitly banned such research and, as NIH director, she must enforce the ban. She has been equally up front about her endorsement of a grant awarded to Emory University for a survey of teenage sexual behavior. The authority to approve the grant lay with Duane Alexander, head of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development where the grant was submitted. "But he brought it to me," says Healy, because he

thought it would be controversial. "I said if I read it and I don't like it, I'm not going to interfere with your delegated authority to fund it. But if I think it is a good piece of work I will not only say that, I will support you."

Healy did support Alexander, and continues to do so despite the fact that Secretary of Health and Human Services Louis Sullivan deemed the survey inappropriate and ordered it put on hold indefinitely.

Has Healy done herself political damage by publicly disagreeing with her bosses? So far, the answer seems to be no. "This administration is very fortunate to have Bernadine Healy at NIH," says her immediate boss, assistant secretary for health James O. Mason. A spokesman for Sullivan also confirmed that the secretary, too, is still in her corner. And Washington insiders also believe that Healy has some powerful friends in the White House, including, some say, White House chief of staff John Sununu, and even the president himself. But political loyalties can be fickle, and a few more serious disagreements could well shorten Healy's tenure.

A tough manager

Not that one would expect such a prospect to tame her devotion to bluntness. It even applies to her management style—at a time when one might guess she needs all the help she can get to reform NIH from within. In her interview with *Science*, Healy was outspoken in her criticism of Raub for the way he handled the Gallo and Baltimore cases before she took over as director. She says allowing Hadley to continue to direct the Gallo and Baltimore cases after she left OSI "was a terrible management decision," because it undermined the ability of OSI to carry out confidential investigations. And she criticized NIH general counsel Robert Lanman for the heavy handed way he went about determining whether Hadley had become too close to Baltimore case whistle blower Margot O'Toole.

Once Healy sees a way to solve a problem, she likes to move quickly. For example, when last May a search committee came up with the name of Kenneth Olden to fill the vacant director's job at the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, she was on the phone to him within hours urging him to join her institute. Olden took the job, and was sworn in 18 June. Or take the case of J. Edward Rall: Healy had been NIH director for less than 6 weeks when she fired Rall from his post as intramural research director, a move that sent shock waves through the Bethesda campus. Since she has recused herself from OSI activities she can't make any changes there, although her criticism of OSI's management suggests that eventually some heads will roll.



Administration support. Healy, with Mason behind her.

alone for a moment and asked for his advice on how best to manage her job. He gave her three rules that she now finds ironic, considering his criticism of her management of the Office of Scientific Integrity (OSI). He told her, she recalls, follow procedures, get good legal advice, and get good staff. No problem, thought Healy, since these closely paralleled her own maxims for being an effective manager. She says her actions with regard to OSI—closing the "satellite" office opened by Suzanne Hadley and requesting a redrafting of the Gallo report—were intended to adhere more strictly to OSI's rules. So it is with a bitter irony that she insists, "I got dragged up on the Hill for following procedures."

Healy is now trying to put a positive spin on her interaction with the Michigan congressman. Throughout the interview with *Science* she emphasized the points where she and Dingell saw eye to eye. "I don't think NIH should be the judge and jury of these cases," she says. "If chairman Dingell and I have some common ground—and we have a lot of common ground, surprisingly—it is that NIH should not be the sole judge of those investigations. NIH should be a partner in those investigations."

Making what may be a strategic error, however, Healy has also sought to shift responsibility for her problems with Dingell away from the congressman and onto his staff. She expressed particular hostility about the way they behaved when they came to interview her before last month's hearing. "They sent their squads to interrogate us all,

Breaking the rules

Although she is quick to identify problems, Healy isn't relentlessly critical of everyone around her—and she can be forgiving. Before she entered the administrative world, Healy was a practicing cardiologist, and by all accounts a darn good one. So it's not surprising that she tends to cast problems in human terms. When it comes to scientific misconduct, for example, she says it is important for people to remember that scientists are human and can make mistakes. "I think the scientific community has been duly humbled by some of the events of the last several years. Anyone who doesn't recognize the vulnerabilities that any scientist has, and the human failings that can infiltrate research even unexpectedly or inadvertently, hasn't had a very good feedback control loop."

But even here, Healy displays her tough side: Like a doctor scolding a patient for unhealthy habits, Healy says scientists must adhere to the highest standards of conduct, or ruin not only their own health but the health of the entire scientific enterprise. At the same time, scientists who do err should be dealt with as individuals. "There is no humanity in this process," complains Healy. She says there are different levels of misconduct—she uses the analogy of venial sins and mortal sins reflecting her Catholic upbringing—and there should be different levels of punishment that will deter but not stigmatize the offender.

Strong stands and big ears

Everyone who knows her expects Healy to continue to take outspoken positions on the issues facing NIH. She has made it clear that the agency will be paying closer attention to women's health and plans to lobby equally hard for greater attention to minority health programs (*Science*, 31 May, p. 1242). She will have more to say about how federal grant money is used to pay universities' overhead costs. And she is developing a strategic plan for NIH—expected to be made public this fall—that will give an indication of where she intends to lead the agency in the next decade.

"Bernie is a very principled person," says Keyworth, her former boss at the Office of Science and Technology Policy, where Healy was deputy director in 1984-85. "Although she's definitely flexible—she has big ears and she listens well, and she learns—nevertheless, she develops strong positions."

Which means she will continue to take hits. But to Healy that's part of getting the job done: She is not interested in making nice, she is interested in accomplishing things. "If reports that my honeymoon is over are true, I celebrate that. I think a fifth anniversary is much nicer than a honeymoon."

■ JOSEPH PALCA

BA Meets in Plymouth on Dinosaurs' Birthday

In the week the communist dinosaur went extinct in the Soviet Union, 3000 scientists gathered in Plymouth at the annual meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the day the dinosaur got its name. Also on offer were some 500 lectures on a vast range of topics.

Dinosaurs' Changing Image

Plymouth—In 1841, Richard Owen invented the dinosaur. Owen, a comparative anatomist, coined the term during a lecture at the BA meeting in this city—a bit of history that provided an excuse for a miniature dinosaur festival at this year's meeting, involving local museums and including 15 lectures and debates.

"Invention" may seem too strong a word, but the reality is that when Owen described the Dinosauria as a new group during his two-and-a-half-hour talk, he had remarkably few fossils to go on. But he had enough confidence in his own skills as a comparative anatomist to stick his neck out—a gamble that won him a place in the scientific history books.

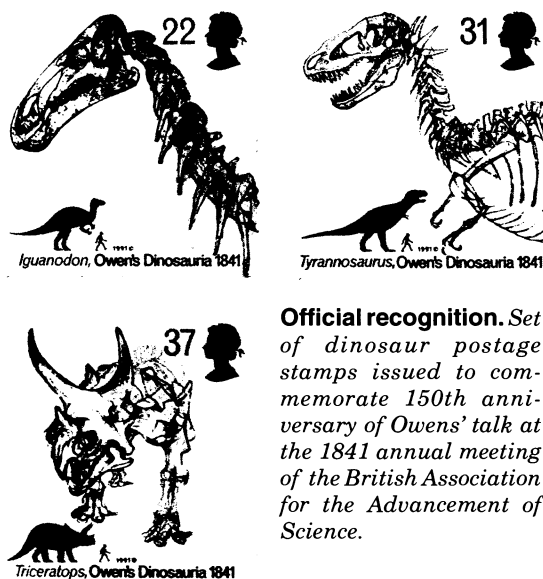
That wasn't his only motivation, however. Owen's lecture clearly shows that he also had a political agenda, says David Norman, director of the University of

on the side of God-given order and the fixed social hierarchy, pointed to the dinosaur as a symbol of how the present was only a shadow of the past. He argued, says Norman, that dinosaurs were far superior in their anatomy and physiology to the "degenerate" reptiles alive today.

Since then, Darwinians have won the day and the dinosaur has been viewed not as a symbol of past perfection, but of stupidity and lumbering bureaucracy. Until recently, that is. Now, Owen's view of the dinosaur is making a comeback of sorts. "Some of the most successful animals of all time" was how Michael Benton, a geologist from the University of Bristol, described the beasts in the BA's prestigious Lyell Lecture. Certainly, the dinosaurs' 165-million-year reign merits that title—and with the global environment deteriorating rapidly there's good reason to doubt that it will be matched by humankind.

Others went further in trying to recast the dinosaurs' image. John Horner, professor of paleontology at Montana State University, even argued that dinosaurs were cute and "would make excellent pets"—at least in the first months of life when they were only a few feet long. They were cute for a good reason, says Horner—they were helpless when born and needed to beg for food from their parents as do modern baby birds. The new view of adult dinosaurs as caring parents comes from Horner's astonishing discoveries of fossilized dinosaur nests in western Montana. In some are newly hatched babies and in others are groups of juveniles—surely demonstrating, Horner says, that growing youngsters were in no hurry to leave the nest and a supply of parental food.

New evidence from the Gobi desert emerged at the meeting to support Horner. Since the 1921 U.S. expedition that found the first dinosaur eggs in the Gobi, Soviet and Mongolian expeditions have found many more eggs and surveyed several nest sites. Konstantin Mikhailov, from the Paleontological Institute in Moscow, described



Official recognition. Set of dinosaur postage stamps issued to commemorate 150th anniversary of Owens' talk at the 1841 annual meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.

Cambridge's Segwick Museum. Although in 1841 neither Charles Darwin nor Karl Marx had written the books that were to change the century, ideas of biological evolution ("transmutation" as it was then known) and, along with it, inevitable social progress, were already in the air. Owen, weighing in against the "progressionists,"