

## Briefings

edited by CONSTANCE HOLDEN

### New IOM Head

Kenneth I. Shine, dean of the University of California at Los



Angeles Medical School, has been chosen as the next head of the Institute of Medicine (IOM). He replaces Samuel Thier, who left last September

to become president of Brandeis University. Shine, a cardiologist who has been an IOM member since 1988, will start work in July.

### Turnabout on AIDS Drug

Hoffmann-La Roche has done an about-face on a promising new antiviral AIDS drug. Seven months ago, the company angered AIDS activists by deciding not to pursue full-scale clinical trials of a compound called Ro 24-7429, insisting that the drug did not fit into its corporate strategy and would be licensed to another pharmaceutical company for development (*Science*, 20 December 1991, p. 1715). Just before Christmas, however, Hoffmann-La Roche announced that it has decided to develop the drug on its own after all.

Ro 24-7429 works in an entirely different way from antiviral drugs currently on the market. Unlike AZT and ddI, which block the activity of the viral enzyme reverse transcriptase, Ro 24-7429 targets a viral protein coded by a gene called *tat*. That protein plays a key role in the viral replication process within an infected cell. Several pharmaceutical companies were reportedly interested in Ro 24-7429 and happily would have taken on the task of developing and marketing it.

Hoffmann-La Roche spokes-

man Paul Oestreicher says the company's decision to keep the drug to itself was influenced by disappointing results reported from early clinical trials with a new class of reverse transcriptase inhibitors. Those results make it more urgent (and presumably more profitable) to develop drugs with novel mechanisms of action. In a letter to *Science*, Oestreicher insisted that, despite the lengthy delay caused by the search for a licensing partner, the company intends to move forward on Ro 24-7429 "in the most expeditious manner possible."

### Stanford: More Bad News

It looks as if the worst isn't over for Stanford in the indirect cost arena. The Defense Contract Audit Agency has agreed with Navy whistleblower Paul Biddle's claim that the university overbilled the government by more than \$200 million in indirect cost charges. The auditors found about \$235 million in overcharges between 1981 and 1988, and, according to a con-

gressional staffer, they expect the numbers for 1989-90 to bring the total to more than \$300 million. Add to that Biddle's claims of nearly \$300 million in overcharges from the yet-unaudited areas of staff benefits and university properties, and the tab could soar to more than \$500 million.

Suspecting that the bad news was imminent, Stanford president Donald Kennedy and board of trustees president James Gaither predicted in a letter in the alumni newspaper *Observer* that the government would back up Biddle.

Kennedy and Gaither say Stanford will fight the auditors' finding, which they say improperly disregards all of the memoranda of understanding on which Stanford's indirect cost rate was based during the 1980s. Biddle finds those memoranda invalid, while Kennedy and Gaither call them "binding contracts."

Congressman John Dingell (D-MI) isn't likely to buy Stanford's argument. "If Stanford wants to say to the American people, We screwed you, but we did it legally, they can do

it," said a member of Dingell's staff. "That was their defense on the last round, and they lost their president over that one."

### Mothballs for New Zealand Telescope

Astronomers searching for evidence of a tenth planet in the solar system have lost a key telescope that was employed in the hunt. Citing budget pressures, the U.S. Naval Observatory (USNO) has curtailed most of its operations at an observatory near Blenheim on New Zealand's South Island. The 8-inch astrographic telescope has already been dismantled and returned to the observatory's headquarters in Washington, D.C. A smaller transit instrument will remain in operation until 1995.

USNO astronomer Robert Harrington has calculated that the southern sky is the most likely place to find "Planet X"—if it exists (see *Science*, 6 December, p. 1454). But he was able to search only about one-third of the most likely locations before the telescope was

### Greenhouse Gas Tax

People may have to cough up a pretty penny at the gas pump if the nation wants to reduce its emissions of carbon dioxide, according to a December report\* from the Department of Energy (DOE). In response to a 1988 congressional request, the report assesses the economic ramifications of ordering a reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to 20% below 1990 levels by 2000.

The reduction strategy DOE explores is a carbon tax levied on utilities. The report estimates that achieving the targeted reduction would require a tax of \$500 per metric ton of carbon. That would end up soaking consumers of about \$95 billion a year—more than doubling the price of gas, heating oil, and electricity.

In an accompanying statement, Energy Secretary James D. Watkins says the report "points out the very high costs to our economy of the large carbon dioxide emission reductions some are advocating." But the report has outraged envi-

ronmental organizations. "It's amazing that people keep making the same fundamental mistake—that the only way to reduce energy is to raise taxes," says Peter Miller, an analyst with the Natural Resources Defense Council. Indeed, Watkins failed to mention another carbon-reducing strategy noted in the very same report: a proposed Forest Service tree-planting program, which aims to reforest 15% of U.S. land. According to the report, the new trees would absorb enough CO<sub>2</sub> to reduce the new tax needed by about 90%.

#### FUEL PRICE CHANGES PER \$500 CARBON TAX

(adapted from DOE)

Fuel	Base cost (\$)	Added cost (\$)	% cost increase
Residential natural gas (thousand cubic feet)	5.87	7.50	125
Gasoline (gallon)	0.98	1.30	135
Electricity (kilowatt hour)	0.065	0.088	135
Heating oil (distillate, gallon)	0.89	1.45	165
Crude oil (barrel)	16.01	60.95	365
Utility coal (short ton)	33.51	276.65	825

1989 constant dollars; base year 1990.

\*"Limiting Net Greenhouse Gas Emissions in the United States," Office of Environmental Analysis, Department of Energy.