FBI Investigates Leaks at OSI

A bizarre twist has occurred in the long-running dispute between National Institutes of Health director Bernadine Healy and Representative John Dingell (D–MI) over the operation of NIH's Office of Scientific Integrity (OSI). The two are now facing off over a probe by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) into leaks of confidential documents from OSI.

For nearly a year, OSI's staff has been hammered by Healy and scientists outside NIH because the office's findings in several cases have been leaked to the press. In particular, the results of two prominent investigations, involving intramural AIDS researcher Robert Gallo and Tufts University immunologist Thereza Imanishi-Kari—the latter in connection with a paper co-authored by Nobel laureate David Baltimore—have been widely reported. To Healy and other critics, the leaks have unfairly damaged or destroyed the reputations of the scientists involved before either case was fully adjudicated. OSI officials have denied any role in the leaks, but this hasn't prevented the office's reputation within the scientific community from suffering (*Science*, 6 September 1991, p. 1084).

NIH never formally investigated the leaks, however. But over the weekend of 7 March, a friend of an OSI employee alleged to NIH officials that confidential documents had been removed from OSI, according to a source close to the FBI investigation who is sympathetic to the NIH administration. Named in the allegation was Suzanne Hadley, formerly OSI deputy director, and two current OSI support staff. Hadley, now an NIH science education official who works part time for Dingell's oversight and investigations subcommittee, has had rocky relations with top NIH officials since Healy removed her from the Gallo and Baltimore investigations last July (*Science*, 26 July 1991, p. 372).

NIH passed the allegations to Richard Kusserow, the inspector general of the Department of Health and Human Services. Kusserow declined to conduct an investigation himself, according to a member of Dingell's staff, because he is receiving Hadley's help in an investigation of possible criminal violations with respect to claims made in applications for patents on an AIDS blood test developed by Gallo's lab. Instead, Kusserow referred the allegations to the FBI, which then opened an investigation.

Hadley says FBI agent Alan Carroll interviewed her on 11 March and told her he had already interviewed two support employees who had admitted giving Hadley confidential documents. Hadley declined to tell *Science* whether she had received such documents, and she says she also refused to tell Carroll. She said Carroll told her NIH claimed the leaks had rendered OSI "totally dysfunctional" and had resulted in financial damages on the order of $9,000 a day. According to Hadley, Carroll then told her that if these allegations proved true, the FBI would seek an indictment from the U.S. attorney's office. Contacted by telephone, Carroll hung up when a reporter asked him for his version of events. Hadley charges that she is the victim of calculated harassment: "It looks like what they're doing is attempting to terrorize people in the OSI and to intimidate me," she says.

Enter Representative Dingell. Last week, he fired off a letter to Healy stating that "this is not the first time we have been forced to write to you about apparent acts of harassment and intimidation aimed at courageous, public-spirited whistleblowers"—a reference to a protest Dingell made last summer when Hadley was removed from the Gallo and Baltimore cases. "This is the craziest thing I've ever seen," says one Dingell aide. "Leaking documents is clearly not a federal crime." But the source close to the FBI investigation claims that NIH had no choice but to pass on for investigation the "very serious allegations" it had received, and adds that additional unspecified allegations are also under FBI investigation. Healy chose not to speak for herself—she did not return a telephone call seeking comment, and an NIH spokeswoman said that the agency cannot comment on personnel matters or investigations.

While the investigation continues, NIH has transferred the two OSI support employees to other jobs at NIH. The locks on Hadley's office have also been changed. Although she is said to be free to return to work, she will be moved to another office and can enter her former office only under supervision. Dingell, for his part, is turning up the heat on NIH by launching his own investigation into the FBI probe. He has requested documents from NIH, including a memo that purports to spell out the damages caused by the leaks. ■ DAVID P. HAMILTON

A Plea for Aid to Ex-Soviet Science

The National Academy of Sciences last week issued an urgent plea for U.S. aid to help reverse the rapid erosion of the former Soviet Union's science and technology infrastructure. If the infrastructure collapses, the academy warns, the consequences could be devastating: Some military scientists would look for employment with atomic weapon programs in Third World nations, hastening nuclear proliferation. Existing research facilities, some ranked among the best in the world, would atrophy. "Outstanding" research teams would disintegrate as the best scientists leave for temporary or permanent positions abroad. And the former Soviet republics could founder without a strong science and technology base.

To avoid those dismal prospects, the academy report*—a product of workshops held on 3 March that brought together 120 leaders of the American science and engineering community—lays out a broad course of action for the U.S. government. Specifically, it suggests that the United States target four areas: conversion of former Soviet weapons science to civilian applications; support of existing civilian research groups; preservation of current interdisciplinary and multinational research projects, particularly those in energy research and environmental studies; and creation of opportunities for the commercialization of technology.

"The principal objective, with respect to the military labs, is the need to co-opt them, to interest them in civil affairs and the well-being of their citizens rather than in making weapons," says Ashton Carter, director of the Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard University and one of the three co-chairmen of the academy workshop. To this end, the report calls for at least $25 million this year to support collaborative research projects between weapons scientists, nonweapons scientists, and U.S. researchers in such fields as warhead dismantlement, radioactive material storage, environmental cleanup, and energy and physics research. Such programs should involve the entire staff of the existing weapons laboratories.

The academy suggests that initial funding for this effort come from the International Science and Technology Center, a multinational "clearinghouse" for research projects involving former Soviet weapons scientists recently proposed by U.S., German, and Russian officials. But it adds that existing plans for the center are far from adequate.

**Reorientation of the Research Capability of the Former Soviet Union*, National Academy Press, Washington, D.C., 1992.

While it is well placed to "catalyze" useful research projects, the center lacks the authority to fund these projects without the explicit approval of its member nations' representatives. To avoid rendering the center a "needless and powerless middleman," the report states, its members should allow it to distribute as much as one-quarter of its funding unilaterally.

Civilian science in the former Soviet Union also offers the West great opportunities thanks to cheap labor and "unique assets" such as research vessels, observatories, and botanical collections. As a result, the academy recommends that the United States provide at least another $25 million this year to facilitate collaborations between civilian scientists and their U.S. counterparts through the extramural programs of agencies like the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Energy. U.S. science agencies could begin shipping journals and obsolete, but still useful, laboratory equipment to former Soviet scientists involved in collaborations, the report suggests. Finally, the academy endorses Representative George Brown's (D–CA) proposal for a $200 million binational foundation to support peer-reviewed projects.

Interdisciplinary research and technology commercialization could best be helped by changes in laws and regulations in the United States and the former Soviet republics, the academy says. For instance, the U.S. government should revise regulations that currently restrict American firms from purchasing high technology from the former Soviet republics; relax U.S. export restrictions, particularly for computer and telecommunication technologies; and remove barriers to signing research contracts between U.S. agencies and former Soviet laboratories. At the same time, the report notes that the republics need to set up clear intellectual property laws; eliminate high taxes on hard currency provided through research grants and contracts; and create a reliable banking system.

Few, if any, of these suggestions will come cheaply, since the dollar figures cited by the academy are merely estimates of what the U.S. government could spend in the current fiscal year. "We're hoping that this $25 million match will ignite a much larger fire," says Carter. ■ DAVID P. HAMILTON

Science and Science Advice in Favor at EPA

Science and peer review are about to get a big promotion at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), according to the agency's chief research officer, Erich Bretthauer. A plan drawn up by Bretthauer and approved last week by EPA chief William Reilly will create a network of about 15 science advisers throughout the agency, all reporting to Reilly. The aim is to make every office aware of the science in actions EPA is considering. The plan also includes an expanded external grants program and a new $5 million fund to support elite positions for five senior scientists at EPA. Reilly cleared a 19-page action memo on 14 March that will put some of these changes into effect immediately. Others will take a year or more to carry out, says Bretthauer, director of the Office of Research and Development.

Science booster. *R&D chief Erich Bretthauer.*

The effort is a response to a critical review* of EPA's science that also came out last week. A panel of experts, created at Reilly's behest, found that "EPA science is of uneven quality, and the agency's policies and regulations are frequently perceived as lacking a strong scientific foundation." The panel, chaired by University of Texas civil engineer Raymond Loehr, also concluded that EPA "does not have a strong science agenda," that scientific advice "is not considered early or often enough in the decision-making process," that the agency needs more and better peer review, and that it "lacks the critical mass of externally recognized scientists needed to make EPA science generally credible to the wider scientific community."

As a remedy, Bretthauer has proposed putting a chief scientific adviser in Reilly's office to supervise the agency's peer-review system and see that technical issues get high-level attention. Just as important, says Bretthauer, a flock of similar advisers would be stationed throughout the agency—one in each major program office and regional center—and all would meet regularly in a science council to discuss agency-wide issues.

The peer-review system would be expanded and made more formal. EPA would deemphasize contract research, Bretthauer says, cutting the amount spent in this category 35% below the 1991 level. The money saved will be channeled to external, academic researchers, who will compete for grants in a peer-reviewed system. Within the agency, scientists in Bretthauer's office will be given a chance to advance on a career ladder without necessarily taking managerial posts. Promotions will be based on merit as reflected in the recent (last 3 years) publication of articles in peer-reviewed journals. "I don't see any better way" of judging scientists' performance, says Bretthauer. Some people at EPA may not welcome this last proposal, says Bretthauer, especially technical workers outside his office who spend more time on regulatory work than on direct research. His solution: retain tough publication standards, but rotate scientists through the regulatory jobs so that everyone has a chance to keep up with his or her research and no one stays too long in one place.

EPA has been criticized for failing to examine its past and assess what it has accomplished with regulations. Now Reilly is proposing to do more retrospective studies and evaluate the effectiveness of the agency's work. This is part of a general plan to look at all environmental concerns in the context of national policy, says Bretthauer. Already, Bretthauer says, the agency has been trying to adopt a risk-based, rather than a legalistic, approach as it plans future research. The goal is to make sure that big decisions are based not on narrow concerns but on a consensus of what will do the most good for the environment.

The common theme, Bretthauer says, is that "we're trying to tilt on a wide variety of issues toward higher quality." This is welcome news to members of the advisory committee that recommended these changes. Says panel member Bernard Goldstein of Rutgers University and the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, the reform proposals are "dynamite...if Reilly follows through." Until now, it's been "very difficult for EPA to interact with the external scientific community." Maybe it will change now, Goldstein says. ■ ELIOT MARSHALL

*Safeguarding the Future: Credible Science, Credible Decisions, EPA, March 1992.