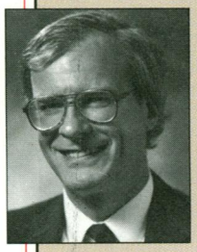
Newspeak at NIH?

■ Long plagued by leaks of confidential misconduct reports, NIH officials have become somewhat touchy on the issue. Last week, for instance, NIH suggested—and quickly withdrew—a rule that would have barred its employees from discussing confidential reports that had been described in the press.

This speech code first came up when NIH director of administration John Mahoney objected to the title of a scheduled talk by unofficial NIH fraud investigator Walter Stewart on the history of an NIH misconduct case involving Nobel laureate David Baltimore—"The Baltimore Fiasco: A Case Study in Fraud." According to memos obtained by *Science*, Mahoney asked Stewart to change the title because official NIH guidelines forbid employees to publicly state personal opinions about the guilt or innocence of anyone NIH is investigating.

Mahoney sent Stewart a copy of the guidelines and asked him to provide "written assurance" that he would follow them. The rules Stewart received, however, included an unusual extra restriction—a prohibition on speaking about "information that has been publicly disclosed, if it is confidential information that should not have been disclosed to the public."



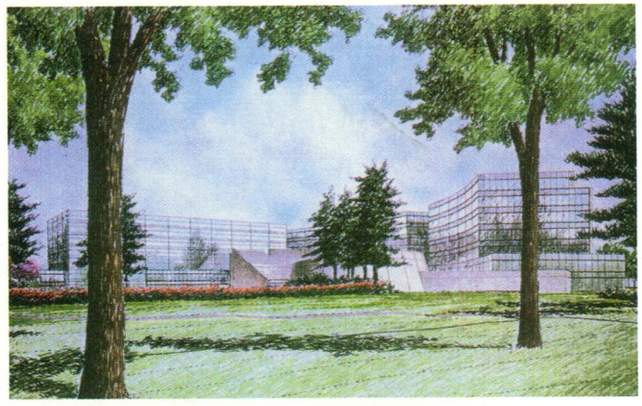
Mahoney

NIH spokeswoman Johanna Schneider claimed that Mahoney, who did not return a call from *Science*, had sent Stewart "draft" guidelines, and that a subsequent revision later that week eliminated the speech code. Schneider also assured a reporter that NIH director Bernadine Healy "had nothing to do" with the speech code, even though she had not been asked about Healy's involvement. Stewart, by the way, renamed his talk "The Baltimore Triumph: New Horizons in Integrity."

Monumental Honors: Respect for the Bursars of Biomedicine

■ This fall, NIH will begin construction on a new building that will not only provide more parking and office space but may also, despite its $176 million price tag, help the agency to achieve its budget goals in these tight fiscal times. How is that possible? Because the structure will be named after Representative William H. Natcher (D–KY), the man who chairs the subcommittee that appropriates money for NIH.

The proposed Natcher Building continues a recent trend at NIH. Since 1984, four other congressmen have appeared on the Bethesda campus map. Building 31 became the Claude Pepper Building, named for the Florida Democrat who supported aging research at NIH. The Stone House became the Lawton Chiles International House; Chiles was a Democrat from Florida who chaired the Senate appropriations subcommittee for NIH. There's also a Lowell Weicker Building for the Connecticut Republican who preceded Chiles as chair of the Senate appropriations subcommittee. And finally, the Silvio Conte Building honors the Massachusetts Republican who pushed through a plan for higher salaries for intramural scientists.



Artist's rendition of NIH's new William H. Natcher Building.

What distinguishes Natcher from his fellow eponyms is that he's the only one still in Congress. Chiles and Weicker are governors; Conte and Pepper have died. Although 82 years old, Natcher looks in great health, and according to his office, plans to run for reelection in November. His building should be completed by 1997.

Science Grows up North

■ Canadian scientists are looking forward to a less pinched existence as a result of some good news last week. The government announced it would make a major new commitment to fund the university granting councils, which finance basic research. Over the next 4 years, the total commitment would come to $1.2 billion (Canadian), which allows growth at 4% per year for the councils.

Canada's 1992-93 budget already included this 4% increase, marking the first time since 1985 that funding for university-based research grew faster than inflation, which now stands at 1.7% and is expected to remain low (*Science*, 6 March, p. 1202). The new announcement extends that welcome trend, allowing the councils to draw upon a 5-year, $1.5 billion allocation to science institutions provided in last year's budget.

The decision to channel so much of the $1.5 billion fund to academic science rather than industry or defense research represents a major victory within the cabinet for Canada's science minister, William Winegard, who has always maintained that his top priority was to support academic research. Says one Canadian science official: "The granting councils should be dancing a jig."

One of the funding agencies, Canada's Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, has already announced that part of this year's increase will be used to raise graduate student stipends and expand the grants program to fund new applicants.

FDA Sinks its Teeth Into Biotech Foods

■ A soon-to-be-released Food and Drug Administration (FDA) document says that biotech foods will be treated no differently from other foods on the FDA's plate for review. The new policy, in keeping with the White House's recent desire to speed approval of biotech products (*Science*, 21 February, p. 911), should simplify the regulatory process for tomatoes, potatoes, and other edibles that have been genetically engineered to—among other traits—taste better, ship more easily, or have built-in resistance to pests.

The draft document, now being reviewed by the Public Health Service (PHS), says that the new biotech foods will be given special scrutiny only when they exhibit certain deleterious characteristics, such as increased levels of natural toxins or a tendency to form byproducts not normally found in the food supply. A genetically engineered food would also trigger an FDA review if it could cause a new allergic reaction. For example, a tomato carrying a gene from a peanut plant to boost its protein might cause a reaction in people allergic to peanuts.

Not surprisingly, the new policy—cooked up in a matter of months by a team led by FDA deputy commissioner for policy Michael Taylor—is on the fast track for approval at the PHS, the Office of Management and Budget, and the White House Council on Competitiveness.

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