of the time advancing the Administration's policy on Medicare reform. Currently, he sits on the Council of Economic Advisors.

FDA, though, doesn't deal much in academic issues. It faces an array of practical challenges, including an overhaul of its food safety division for improved biodefense; concerns about how to protect human subjects in drug trials; new worries about West Nile virus contaminating blood and transplanted organs; and a long-running budget battle. Without commenting on McClellan, FDA senior associate commissioner Murray Lumpkin confirms that the agency is confronting an unusual set of new obligations.

Those who know McClellan have no doubt he'll rise to the challenge. "He is gifted at searching out the room in the center where a compromise can be struck," says a former colleague at the Treasury Department. "I have zero concern about his ability to manage that agency."

One of McClellan's unique traits, says longtime friend and Harvard economist David Cutler, is his willingness to let the data overcome personal biases, as in a paper the pair produced showing that the benefits of new technologies to treat heart attacks outweighed their high cost—contrary to their expectations.

Cutler acknowledges, though, that McClellan probably wouldn't enjoy the "very political parts of the job," which might be "the things he'd do worst at or like the least." But Cutler and others who have worked with McClellan are convinced that his wide-ranging gifts will offset any shortcomings. **–JENNIFER COUZIN**

FRENCH SCIENCE

Scientists Blast Budgetary Bad News

PARIS—If the phrase "lies, damn lies, and statistics" hadn't already been coined, French researchers might have been tempted to do so last week when the government unveiled competing versions of its civil R&D budget for 2003.

Figures released by the Finance and Research ministries paint strikingly different pictures. According to the Finance Ministry, the 2003 budget would shrink by 0.8% to €8.65 billion—from €8.72 billion in 2002—whereas the Research Ministry has it rising by 1.4% to €8.84 billion. SNCS, a leading researchers' union, contends that the budget is in fact going down, and by week's end it had collected signatures from more than 1000 lab chiefs and rank-and-file scientists on a petition claiming that the cuts would have a "severe impact on the dynamism of our research."

The bizarre budgetary duet played out at the annual budget press conferences here last week. At the Research Ministry's unveiling, new minister Claudie Haigneré claimed that the R&D budget was even healthier than the numbers indicated, as her ministry intended to carry over "very probably more than" €720 million in unspent cash from 2002, thus raising the budget by 5.3%. The former astronaut's budgetary magic dazzled—and befuddled—a room full of journalists. "Is the budget up or down; is it a success or a failure?" asked one anguished reporter.

Analyses suggest that the finance figures are nearer the truth. The Research Ministry's projected gains include €250 million next year in extra budgetary authority, including the French Petroleum Institute's €200 million budget and money from a handful of other programs. Moreover, much of the funds that Haigneré intends to carry over are not under her control, asserts SNCS secretary-general Jacques Fossey. "More than half belongs to the laboratories; the public research institutes merely act as bankers," he says. By SNCS's calculations, the 2003 figure is a 1.3% drop, or about 3% after inflation.

Even though rumors of a 7.6% cut in civilian R&D proved unfounded, many scientists are furious. "This is one of the most catastrophic research budgets we have had in living memory," says chemist Henri Audier, a board director of the basic research agency CNRS. Spending on research grants would fall by 11% overall, with CNRS absorbing a 17% hit. "It will be very difficult to launch any new projects without sacrificing existing ones," Audier says. In another sleight of hand, the draft budget—which must be approved by parliament—would create 400 temporary (18-month-long) postdoc positions at the institutes while scrapping 150 permanent posts. Universities would fare a bit better, winning an extra 420 positions for lecturers and professors.

"In France," grouses one researcher, "every time the right comes to power, research is one of its first victims." That characterization, however, is rejected by Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin. "You will see that we will invest more in research in 2003 than in 2002," he claimed in a television interview. Haigneré, meanwhile, insists that the draft budget is "transparent and true." Observers expect the budget to pass with minor tweaks later this year. **–BARBARA CASASSUS**

Barbara Casassus is a freelance writer in Paris.

Looking on the bright side. Claudie Haigneré's figures show an increase for research; others' show a decrease.

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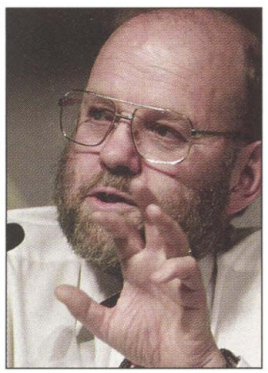
STEM CELL RESEARCH

Cloning Pioneer Heads Toward Human Frontier

BERLIN—The father of Dolly the lamb is hoping to blaze a new trail in the science of cloning: He plans to apply the technology in the controversial arena of human embryonic stem cell research. In a briefing for journalists here last week, Ian Wilmut, leader of the team at the Roslin Institute in Edinburgh, U.K., that 6 years ago produced the world's first mammal cloned from an adult cell, announced that his group will attempt to use nuclear transfer to create human embryos that are genetically identical to adult donor cells. These embryos would then be tapped for stem cell lines.



Pushing forward. Ian Wilmut wants to clone human cells.

Wilmut and his team are not the first out of the blocks to try nuclear transfer experiments with human tissue, but they appear to be the first to test the United Kingdom's new procedures for approving such studies. The creation of cloned embryos is allowed in the U.K. as long as a license is obtained from the U.K.'s Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA). An HFEA spokesperson confirms that Wilmut's group would be the first to apply for a license. So-called reproductive cloning—implanting a cloned human embryo into a surrogate mother—is illegal in the United Kingdom and is not being contemplated by Wilmut.

Several teams have attempted nuclear transfer using human embryos in secret—with little apparent success. Advanced Cell Technology (ACT), a biotech firm in Worcester, Massachusetts, reported last year that its scientists had produced early embryos but no blastocysts and therefore no