

Health and Human Services cited by D. Michaels *et al.* in their Editorial "Advice without dissent" (25 Oct., p. 703).

Last fall, I was part of a group, most of whom had been consultants to the Army Science Board (ASB), who were nominated to become full members of that Board, which is composed of scientists, engineers, and retired flag-rank military whose mission is to advise the Army on technical matters. The Army passed our names to the White House Liaison Office in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) after the Army's approval. Once there, however, about a dozen of us were disapproved.

I learned from an ASB colleague that there is a Web site (www.opensecrets.org) that is being used to see the names of donors to political campaigns. I was also told by a member of the ASB staff that I was supposed to have contributed to Senator John McCain's campaign—the reason for my being disapproved. I went to the Web site (still active) and saw that a William S. Howard, a retiree from Fairfax, VA, had contributed twice for a total of \$1000 to McCain's campaign. Because "S" is not my middle initial, I do not live in Fairfax, VA, and the zip code listed on the Web site is not the same as mine, and because I had made no such contributions, I asked the ASB to try to reverse the OSD decision. They demurred, saying that they did not want to upset the OSD White House Liaison Office.

The Editorial by Michaels *et al.* is right on the mark. I wonder if the problem is broader than this. The country is not being well served by any administration's policy of seeking advice only from a group of scientists and engineers who have passed the administration's political litmus test.

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Unpopular Opinions Need Not Apply

THE EDITORIAL BY D. MICHAELS ET AL. ("Advice without dissent," 25 Oct., p. 703) describes attempts by Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson to influence the advice the government gets from advisory committees by stacking their membership with scientists who share President Bush's views on science and health policy. The stories about efforts to manipulate committees that advise the government on such highly charged issues as genetic testing and childhood lead poisoning are troubling, but the manipulation extends even more deeply into the federal

science establishment than they suggest.

Secretary Thompson announced when the Bush administration took office that he wanted to conduct a review of Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) advisory committees and that nominations for membership on those panels would be frozen until his review was completed. Thompson's review includes not only the high-level panels that advise the DHHS on matters of policy, but also some peer-review study sections, which are also advisory committees under federal law. I am chair of one of the affected study sections, which reviews research grant proposals submitted to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and other agencies. The 2-year freeze on new memberships has complicated our work, but it was assumed that study sections, which are charged rather narrowly with advising federal agencies on the scientific merit of proposed research projects, were not the real targets and that we would eventually be allowed to continue with business as usual.

This assumption has proven to be incorrect. Secretary Thompson's office recently sent word that three candidates nominated for permanent membership on the study section would not be confirmed. NIOSH's Director was allowed to nominate replacements for the three rejected candidates, however, rather than having to accept a slate named by Thompson's office.

The secretary declined to give reasons for rejecting the three scientists nominated for membership on the study section. They are all established scientists who had served as temporary members for some time and whose qualifications had been duly reviewed and approved at every other level. The reasoning nevertheless seems clear in at least one case: One of the rejected nominees is an expert in ergonomics who has publically supported a workplace ergonomics standard.

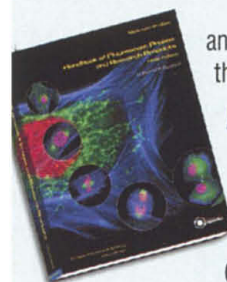
It is not clear how such views could affect public policy, except through a long, convoluted pathway in which a reviewer might favor a proposed project whose results, when the project was completed, could eventually be cited in support of a standard. But that is beside the point. In contrast to policy advisory boards, where the potential for political conflict is recognized and members are supposed to represent a range of views, study section members are selected for their expertise in research and may not consider the relevance of the projects they review to specific government policies.

This level of political interference with peer review is an ominous precedent for research throughout the federal government. I am not aware of attempts to ma-

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SCIENCE'S COMPASS

nipulate the membership of other DHHS study sections, but many aspects of human biology and medicine are controversial, and there is no assurance that the same tactics will not be used elsewhere. All scientists who have served as reviewers or rely on study sections for expert, unbiased reviews should be concerned, and so should the end-users of the knowledge that federally funded research generates.

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CORRECTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

SPECIAL ISSUE ON THE DYNAMIC SYNAPSE:

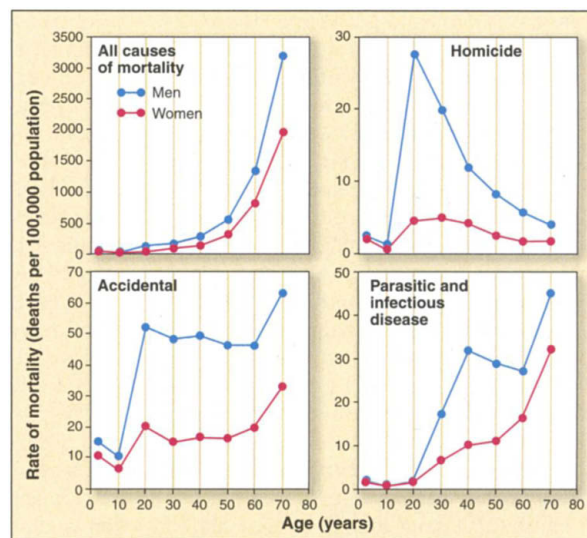
REVIEWS: "Emerging roles of presynaptic proteins in Ca^{++} -triggered exocytosis" by J. Rettig and E. Neher (25 Oct., p. 781). The first three sentences of the abstract are not the authors' work. The correct abstract appears here: "The twinning of techniques from biophysics and molecular biology has led to remarkable progress in understanding the molecular mechanisms of synaptic

transmission. Here, we review the current picture of Ca^{++} -triggered exocytosis which has emerged from studies of a simple, cellular model, the adrenal chromaffin cell. We discuss the molecular players which have been assigned a specific role in a particular step of this process and give a brief outlook on what these insights might tell us on mechanisms of short-term plasticity at classical synapses."

PERSPECTIVES: "Vortex cores—smaller than small" by J. Miltat and A. Thiaville (18 Oct., p. 555). Several errors were introduced during editing. In the third paragraph of the first column, in line 10, (1) should be cited instead of (9), and in line 12, (5) should be cited instead of (3). In the caption for the first figure, (4) should have been cited rather than (1, 2). Panel A in this figure is from (4); the credit line was omitted by mistake. In the first full paragraph of the second column, "high-temperature superconductors" should read "superconductors." In line 10 of the third column, (5) should be

cited instead of (4); in line 26, (3) should be cited instead of (5). In the second figure, panel B, the formula should read " $\mathbf{B} = \nabla \times \mathbf{A}$." In reference (1), the first author's name is Feldtkeller.

PERSPECTIVES: "Sex differences in mortality rate" by I. P. F. Owens (20 Sept., p. 2008). An earlier version of the figure was mistakenly published. The correct version appears below.



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