SIDELINES
CULTURAL VALUES.

Carla Ellis hadn’t cartooned regularly since her undergraduate days in the 1960s. But a contest put on by the Union of Concerned Scientists to highlight what the advocacy group sees as the increasing U.S. government manipulation of research inspired the Duke University computer scientist to sharpen her pencil. “My cartooning is kind of a secret,” says Ellis, who is especially concerned about “censorship” at the Environmental Protection Agency and Food and Drug Administration. Ellis is one of 12 finalists vying for the $500 prize. The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy had no comment on the contest.

DEATHS
DEVOTED. Mental health researchers and practitioners are in shock over the murder of Washington, D.C.—area psychiatrist Wayne Fenton on 3 September. Fenton, 53, was allegedly beaten to death in his office by a patient, 19-year-old Vitali A. Davydov, who was suffering from symptoms of both bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.

Fenton was director of the division of adult translational research and treatment at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) and associate director of clinical affairs. NIMH psychiatrist Husseini Manji says Fenton was “very instrumental in trying to get treatment studies under way” for both schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, which “he viewed as the cancers of mental illness.” In addition to his full-time job, Fenton spent evenings and weekends seeing patients, most of whom were “very ill,” Manji says.

“Everyone’s absolutely devastated. Wayne was one of those decent, decent good guys who goes out of his way to help people. … Maybe [the murder] will raise awareness of how bad these illnesses are.”

Awards >>

FACE OF SCIENCE. It’s not quite a labs-to-riches story, but physicist Kathy Sykes has gone from being a Bristol University postdoc to being one of the U.K.’s best known advocates of science. Last week Sykes, now professor of public engagement in science and technology and part-time TV personality, won the $19,000 Kohn Prize from the Royal Society for enhancing public understanding of science.

After earning a Ph.D. studying biodegradable plastics, Sykes cut her popularizing teeth as head of science at Explore@Bristol, a hands-on science museum. She appeared on the BBC’s Rough Science and initiated the Cheltenham Science Festival and FameLab, a nationwide talent competition in which researchers have 3 minutes to talk about science. In 2002, her alma mater made her the youngest university professor in the United Kingdom.

As a pillar of academic life, Sykes is trying to improve how the university relates to the city around it. She’s organized community events to discuss the impact of drugs on the brain and behavior and an interactive science exhibit in a local shopping mall.

BIG MONEY. Researchers in plant science and astronomy are among the winners of this year’s prizes awarded by the International Balzan Foundation in Milan, Italy.

Elliott Meyerowitz of the California Institute of Technology and Chris Somerville of Stanford University share $800,000 for their work on establishing Arabidopsis as a model organism. Paolo de Bernardis of the University of Rome “La Sapienza” and Andrew Lange of the California Institute of Technology share another $800,000 for their role in the Boomerang Antarctic Balloon experiment, which mapped background cosmic radiation left over from the big bang. The foundation has also awarded humanities prizes to musicologist Ludwig Finscher of the University of Heidelberg in Germany and to political scientist Quentin Skinner of the University of Cambridge in the U.K.