

SCIENCE

Publisher: Richard S. Nicholson
Editor-in-Chief: Floyd E. Bloom
Editor: Ellis Rubinstein
Managing Editor: Monica M. Bradford
Deputy Editors: Philip H. Abelson (*Engineering and Applied Sciences*); John I. Brauman (*Physical Sciences*); Thomas R. Cech (*Biological Sciences*)

Editorial Staff

Assistant Managing Editor: Dawn Bennett
Senior Editors: Eleanor Butz, R. Brooks Hanson, Pamela J. Hines, Barbara Jasny, Katrina L. Kelnor, Paula A. Kiberstis, Linda J. Miller, L. Bryan Ray, Phillip D. Szuroimi, David F. Voss
Associate Editors: Gilbert J. Chin, Suki Parks
Letters: Christine Gilbert, *Editor*; Steven S. Lapham
Book Reviews: Katherine Livingston, *Editor*; Jeffrey Hearn, *Editorial Assistant*
Editing: Valerie Jablow, *Supervisor*; Cara Tate, *Senior Copy Editor*; Jeffrey E. Cook, Harry Jach, Erik G. Morris, Christine M. Pearce
Copy Desk: Ellen E. Murphy, *Supervisor*; Joi S. Granger, Daniel T. Helgerman, Melissa Q. Rosen, Beverly Shields, Kameaka Williams, *Assistant*
Editorial Support: Sherry Farmer, *Supervisor*; Brent Gentleman, Carolyn Kyle, Michele Listsard, Diane Long, Patricia M. Moore, Ted Smith
Administrative Support: Sylvia Kihara, Charlene King, Jeanette Prastein
Telephone: 202-326-6501; **FAX:** 202-289-7562; **TDD:** 202-408-7770

News Staff

News Editor: Colin Norman
Features Editor: John M. Benditt
Deputy News Editors: Tim Appenzeller, Joshua Fischman, Jean Marx, Jeffrey Mervis
News & Comment/Research News Writers: Linda B. Felaco (copy), Constance Holden, Jocelyn Kaiser, Richard A. Kerr, Andrew Lawler, Eliot Marshall, Rachel Nowak, Robert F. Service, Richard Stone, Lori Wolfgang (intern)
Bureaus: Marcia Barinaga (Berkeley), Jon Cohen (San Diego), James Glanz (Chicago), Dennis Normile (Tokyo), Wade Roush (Boston)
Contributing Correspondents: Barry A. Cipra, Elizabeth Culotta, Ann Gibbons, Anne Simon Moffat, Virginia Morell, Robert Pool, Gary Taubes
Administrative Support: Fannie Groom
Telephone: 202-326-6500; **FAX:** 202-371-9227; **Internet Address:** science_news@aaaas.org

Art & Production Staff

Production: James Landry, *Director*; Wendy K. Shank, *Manager*; Elizabeth A. Harman, *Assistant Manager*; Laura A. Creveling, Scherraine B. Mack, Stephen E. Taylor, *Associates*; Leslie Blizard, *Assistant*
Art: Amy Decker Henry, *Director*; C. Faber Smith, *Associate Director*; Katharine Sutliff, *Scientific Illustrator*; Holly Bishop, *Graphics Associate*; Elizabeth Carroll, Preston Morrighan, *Graphics Assistants*

Europe Office

Editorial: Richard B. Gallagher, *Office Head and Senior Editor*; Stella M. Hurlley, Julia Uppenbrink, *Associate Editors*; Belinda Holden, *Editorial Associate*
News: Daniel Clery, *Editor*; Nigel Williams, *Correspondent*; Michael Balter (*Paris*), Patricia Kahn (*Heidelberg*), *Contributing Correspondents*
Administrative Support: Janet Mumford; Anna Sewell
Address: 14 George IV Street, Cambridge, UK CB2 1HH
Telephone: (44) 1223-302067; **FAX:** (44) 1223-302068
Internet address: science@science-int.co.uk

Science Editorial Board

Charles J. Arntzen	F. Clark Howell
David Baltimore	Paul A. Marks
J. Michael Bishop	Yasutomi Nishizuka
William F. Brinkman	Helen M. Ranney
E. Margaret Burbidge	Bengt Samuelsson
Pierre-Gilles de Gennes	Robert M. Solow
Joseph L. Goldstein	Edward C. Stone
Mary L. Good	James D. Watson
Harry B. Gray	Richard N. Zare
John J. Hopfield	

EDITORIAL

From Rhetoric to Reality

Many, many Americans share the view of a man in a focus group held recently in Columbus, Ohio, who said, "I believe in supporting research because I believe in the possibilities." What an endorsement for the scientific enterprise! Surveys show that scientists are among the most respected professionals in the United States, that science-based institutions are highly regarded, and that citizens strongly support publicly funded research.

To make an up-to-date evaluation of these last assertions, Research!America commissioned Louis Harris and Associates to conduct a survey of the U.S. public during June 1995. Out of 1004 adults surveyed, with a margin of error estimated at 3.1%, the survey found that (i) 94% of respondents believed that it is important for the United States to maintain its role as a world leader in medical research; (ii) 65% opposed cuts in federal support for universities and hospitals, and those under the age of 30 opposed such measures by nearly 75%; (iii) 73% would pay more taxes to support medical research, which duplicates the results when the same question was asked in a 1993 Harris poll; (iv) 61% wanted their senators and congresspeople to support legislation that would give tax credits to private industries to conduct more medical research; and (v) 69% agreed with the statement, "Even if it brings no immediate benefits, basic science research which advances the frontiers of knowledge is necessary and should be supported by the Federal Government."

Despite these indications of the public's priorities, the congressional budget axe may soon be wielded with seeming disregard for years of public investment in research. Because members of Congress very rarely hear from their constituents about the value of investing in scientific research, there is a sense that threatened cuts are inevitable. Why hasn't the public spoken out? It is hard for scientists to feel optimistic about delivering on the promise of scientific opportunity to a public whose support often seems more rhetorical than real.

Conveying to the public a sense of reality about the future of scientific research is the crux of the matter. Very few nonscientists are aware that science is at risk. Fewer still realize that their tax dollars support science and that they therefore have a personal investment at stake. The challenge of activating positive but currently passive public support is every scientist's responsibility. Virtually every scientist is supported by public dollars, whether the source of those dollars is taxes, consumer spending, philanthropy, venture capital, or a combination thereof. Yet scientists feel awkward engaging in conversation with members of the public from the point of view of an employee reporting to the boss. This is ironic, because regardless of the nature of the public forum—one-on-one conversation, Rotary Club presentation, Internet bulletin board, or elementary school classroom—it is both appropriate and easy for scientists to convey a responsive attitude to the public.

If scientists approached public discussion with an "I work for you" attitude, it would go a long way toward bridging the gap between scientists and nonscientists, without having to wait several generations for improved science education to have a positive impact on the citizenry. Public opinion polls and focus groups reveal that members of the non-scientifically trained public would welcome the opportunity to meet scientists in settings where dialogue could take place and scientists could answer questions and offer their resources (most often brainpower) to help meet needs identified by citizen groups.

As initially awkward as it may be to give the culture of science a more populist orientation, it will be more difficult and take much longer to change the culture of the nonscientific community to accept "hands-off" support of research. Demonstrating accessibility as well as accountability to the public that pays their way and values their work is the easiest and quickest way for scientists to achieve a higher rank for science in the nation's priorities. When scientists convey accessibility, accountability, and pride in working in the public's interest, the public will be more likely to actively take up their cause, insisting to elected representatives that support for science be allocated not on the basis of cost-of-living increases or to accommodate across-the-board cuts, but on the basis of scientific opportunity, so that all citizens will benefit from a stronger economy and improved health and well-being just as rapidly as is scientifically feasible.

Mary Woolley

Mary Woolley is the president of Research! America in Alexandria, VA, a national nonprofit alliance dedicated to increasing public awareness about the value of medical research.

Science

From rhetoric to reality

M Woolley

Science **269** (5230), 1495.
DOI: 10.1126/science.7667625

ARTICLE TOOLS

<http://science.sciencemag.org/content/269/5230/1495.citation>

PERMISSIONS

<http://www.sciencemag.org/help/reprints-and-permissions>

Use of this article is subject to the [Terms of Service](#)

Science (print ISSN 0036-8075; online ISSN 1095-9203) is published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1200 New York Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20005. The title *Science* is a registered trademark of AAAS.

Copyright © 1995 The Authors, some rights reserved; exclusive licensee American Association for the Advancement of Science. No claim to original U.S. Government Works.