

There Are Reasons For Optimism As We Launch The New Year

By Eugene Garfield

The Scientist 8[1]:12, January 10, 1994

Although the United States research community had its share of problems during 1993--a depressed job market, congressional budget cutting, the demise of the superconducting supercollider, and so forth--it was a banner year in many respects, as well, yielding abundant cause for us to be optimistic as we enter the new year.

Our hopes should be buoyed, for instance, by the knowledge that the National Institutes of Health is now led by Harold Varmus, a distinguished biologist. Varmus appears eager to defend the clear merits of basic biomedical investigation and to voice the demand, on behalf of the nation's bench scientists, for the financial--and philosophical--support that curiosity-driven research clearly deserves.

Not unrelated is the sense of confidence we can gain from the recent appointment of Neal Lane as director of the National Science Foundation. On page 11 of this issue, we present an exclusive interview with Lane, who also appears to understand the value of untargeted research. Lane, of course, will have his hands full in his efforts to accommodate the interests of pure research while under pressure from powerful figures in government and industry who insist that federally supported science must have a practical, fiscal, near-term--if not immediate--payoff.

Also most gratifying during the past year was the momentum achieved by those organizations and individuals dedicated to the eradication of sexual harassment from the scientific workplace and the fair treatment of women researchers. The articles on the front page of the current issue underscore the progress that's being made regarding these concerns; the elaborate projects under way at the Association for Women in Science and other organizations, along with evidence of a rising consciousness throughout the science community, are indeed heartening.

Looking back over *The Scientist's* coverage during 1993, I remain particularly encouraged by a front-page photo we ran in our October 18 issue: It pictured Hillary Rodham Clinton gazing admiringly at Mary Lasker, a long-time supporter of basic research; the captured moment signaled to me that the interests of the nation's individual investigators have an appropriately high position on the Clinton agenda.

The interests of biomedical scientists are of vital concern to me, as publisher, since the overwhelming percentage of our 50,000-plus readers are NIH grantees--among them more than 90 percent of the members of the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology and of the American Federation for Clinical Research. Members of

these two groups alone account for a huge percentage of NIH extramural grants, not to mention grants from such private foundations as the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. While a significant, and increasing, number of our readers are industry-supported researchers, it should be clear that the prospects for *The Scientist's* continuing success are closely intertwined with the professional prospects of our academic readership, as well, and their success in securing NIH's support.

Repeated studies give me good reason to believe that *The Scientist* plays a unique role as a vital news and opinion source for America's scientific community. While we all suffer from information overload, our readers tell us that they find our publication both useful and enjoyable. In 1994, we'll continue our in-depth coverage of major news events, employment-related issues, research breakthroughs and emerging patterns, and the latest innovations in laboratory tools and technology. And we'll continue

presenting incisive opinions and commentaries by and about the men and women who are shaping the science community.

Many uncertainties face us all as we enter the new year. We can only hope, for instance, that the sluggish U.S. economy will regain energy; we can only hope that President Clinton's health care reform and free-trade programs will materialize as beneficial for both science and society; and we can only hope that Congress will play a proper role in supporting the nation's research activities.

As the year progresses, *The Scientist's* readers can depend on us to keep them up to date on these and other crucially important matters. At the same time, we at *The Scientist* will depend on our readers to keep us up to date on their personal views concerning the issues of the day as well as their reactions to our publication.