
As We Launch Into The New Year, Reality Must Temper Expectations

Reprinted from *THE SCIENTIST*® 7(1):12, 11 January, 1993.

As the *The Scientist* publishes its first issue of 1993, Bill Clinton stands ready for his presidential inauguration. As a candidate focused on “change,” he enjoyed the strong backing of scientists. But it is not unreasonable, given his promise, to suggest that the scientific community may harbor some heightened expectations that should be tempered with reality.

For example, expectations that Clinton will magically relieve agonizing budget constraints on basic research must be softened by the understanding that humanitarian aid in Somalia and elsewhere, which most of us applaud, can’t help aggravating the fiscal problems we face. As the year unfolds, addressing other trouble spots around the world—such as Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe—may require additional sacrifices so that the United States’ moral imperatives abroad are honored.

In my opinion, these moral imperatives require that we not abandon Russian researchers facing mass unemployment—even though we are struggling to solve our own job-shortage problems. Many Russian scientists are being exploited for less than \$100 per month; some of the

lucky ones, enjoying the “munificence” of U.S. firms, may make as much as \$400. Today, American scientists often earn well over \$50,000 a year. Why shouldn’t thousands of our best scientific colleagues in the former Soviet Union—and the Third World as well—earn at least a tenth of that each year? In this new year, I suggest that we are duty bound to seek ways to see this happen.

Especially gratifying in this connection is the recent donation of George Soros (see story on page 3). Unless we find a way to temporarily subsidize the Russian science intelligentsia, researchers there inevitably will migrate to this and other Western countries. The wisest course for us, economically as well as morally, is to support them in their homelands and enable them—through institutional and corporate subsidy—to publish their research in peer-reviewed international journals.

Concerning domestic unemployment woes in science, recent economic indicators give us hope that the U.S. recession may be easing. But again, heightened expectations must be balanced by a realistic view. Since underemployment in research continues, there is an urgent need for

all scientists to become even more vocal in lobbying for the support of both the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation. We must convince the new Congress that it is in America's short- and long-term interest to increase the number of first-time grants so that more young scientists can put their talents to work rather than remain jobless or underemployed.

The public has repeatedly demonstrated its support for biomedical research, and I am sure that the public will support the expanded funding this research requires. (Incidentally—while this may not rest well with diehard Democrats—I feel that our new president would be wise to tap the talents of Bush appointees Walter Massey at NSF and Bernadine Healy at NIH, both of whom are committed to expanded basic research.)

As 1993 moves along, we will be discussing these and many other urgent matters in the pages of *The Sci-*

entist: the growing role of women and minorities, science education, ethical issues, and so on. The flow of reliable information is needed to keep the science community's expectations in perspective. In keeping with this conviction, we will be working to dramatically extend our audience, both in print and electronically. Already, we have been working closely with several professional societies to ensure that this voice of the scientific community reaches their members at the lowest cost. We also have just launched an experiment whereby *The Scientist* is available free of charge on NSFnet (see notice on page 3). And we have conveyed to academic department heads that we are prepared to mail *The Scientist* gratis to any Ph.D. candidate or postdoc, including those currently unemployed. For information on this program, contact Craig Montesano, Circulation Assistant, at (800) 258-608, Ext. 1576.

And this is only a start. Best wishes for the New Year.