

What's New

By Bob Park



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1. BUBBLES: TO FLACK OR NOT TO FLACK.

An editorial by Don Kennedy in the March 8 issue of Science, "To Publish or Not to Publish," describes his courageous stand in publishing a controversial paper even though "it had become clear that a number of people didn't want us to publish this paper." Last week WN revealed that Science would carry an article by Taleyarkhan et al. from Oak Ridge National Laboratory ([WN 1 Mar 02](#)), claiming evidence of d-d fusion correlated with sonoluminescence from collapsing bubbles in deuterated acetone. However, Shapira and Saltmarsh, also from Oak Ridge, using purportedly superior detection and analysis equipment, found no evidence for fusion. Kennedy, it turns out, was merely urged to delay publishing the Taleyarkhan result until it could be accompanied by the Saltmarsh finding. Instead, Science accompanied the Taleyarkhan paper with a glowing "Perspectives" article, a "News" report and an editorial. Worse, Science issued an embargoed press release. A press embargo is a device meant to suppress dissenting views the day a story breaks. We at WN are not press, however, nor did our information come from Science. After WN broke the story, Science dropped its embargo. Both sides, Kennedy's editorial concludes, "would do well to wait for the scientific process to do its work." But in the end, it was Science that refused to wait until it had a balanced report.

2. HEALTH PROBLEMS: WHITE HOUSE COMMISSION ENDS, PROBLEMS BEGIN.

In the waning months of his administration, while pardoning felons and bestowing various favors on supporters, Bill Clinton rewarded loyal Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA), an ardent believer in superstitious medicine, with an executive order creating a 20-member White House Commission on Complementary and Alternative Medicine Policy. It was to last two years and submit a report to the President on how to spread the benefits of magic medicine. James Gordon, a leading "mind-body" proponent, was picked to head the commission, and he proceeded to select a "balanced" collection of true believers in acupuncture, Reiki, homeopathy, herbs, native American cures, quack diets and "energy" medicine of every sort. There are no legitimate scientific researchers on the Commission. Gordon himself has an interesting background, having been an ardent follower of the late Bhagwan Shri Rajneesh, he of the 35 Rolls Royces. The Bhagwan was deported after it was learned that his followers had deliberately poisoned some 700 residents of Antelope, Oregon with salmonella to keep them from the polls in a local election. The Commission officially terminated yesterday, and delivered its report to the White House. The report, which will not be made public for at least a month, is expected to call for legislation that would require insurance providers to cover the witch doctor of your choice. Since the Commission was created under the Clinton administration, it is hoped that the Bush White House will name a panel of medical experts to review the report.

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Opinions are the author's and are not necessarily shared by the University, but they should be.