

National News

U.S. students rank poorly in science

According to results of an international science survey released on Feb. 29 by the National Science Foundation, American students in the 5th, 9th, and 12th grades perform poorly in science compared to their counterparts around the world.

These data bear out the observation of a recent visitor to the National Air and Space Museum, who found that children viewing the filmed landing of the lunar module on the Moon commented, "They are putting one over on us—this never really happened!"

American 5th graders in the survey ranked 8th among 15 countries, 9th graders placed 15th in a field of 16, and seniors placed last out of 14 countries. Advanced chemistry students placed 11th and second-year physics students were 9th among 13 countries.

"For a technologically advanced country, it would appear that a reexamination of how science is presented and studied is required," concluded the preliminary report of the Second International Science Study.

Witches take off, with help from Dukakis

The Witches' League for Public Awareness is launching a new public relations campaign, according to a report that appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* of London on March 1, datelined New York. Spearheading the campaign is Miss Laurie Cabot, who was "recently designated by the Governor of Massachusetts, Mr. Michael Dukakis, as the 'Official Witch of Salem,'" the article explains.

Cabot is the central figure in the Witches' League for Public Awareness, and in the "world of 'Wicca,' the name some 100,000 American adherents to witchcraft prefer to apply to their religion." Cabot, "in her black robes, . . . hailed as a significant victory" the decision by Hollywood director Jim Henson to present a more 'enlightened' view

of witchcraft, in his screening of author Roald Dahl's novel, *The Witches*." This "landmark concession" caused "jubilation" in Salem, Massachusetts, "where witches were burned at the stake in colonial America."

Henson's letter to the Witches' League says, "We feel that witches have been portrayed as archetypes of evil in folklore and mythology. Knowing of your concern, however, we intend to incorporate into our script that the witches we are dealing with are not representative of those . . . who were connected with black magic."

The *Telegraph* adds that the Witches League "is about to launch an image-building campaign to enlighten those beyond the Wiccan circle. Witchcraft, the group's literature counsels, is a benign revival of pre-Christian West European paganism that was based on the ancient mother goddesses found in Wales and Ireland until the 12th century. It is, says Miss Cabot, a science, religion, philosophy, and art, and does not involve Devil worship."

Air Force: Soviets near to ABM 'breakout'

U.S. Air Force Intelligence has officially concluded that the Soviet Union is on the verge of a "breakout" of the ABM treaty, according to an editorial published in the *Wall Street Journal* on Feb. 25. Moscow is said to be nearly ready to deploy a nationwide anti-missile system, which possibly could be in place next year.

"The finding," said the *Journal*, "is based on two new pieces of evidence: First, the Soviets are 'intermetting' their early-warning radars. They have conducted 'hand-off exercises' in which the large phased-array radars like the controversial one at Krasnoyarsk pick up targets and alert the Flat Twin and Pawn Shop mobile radars that guide their SH-04 and SH-08 anti-missile interceptors. . . .

"Second, the Soviets are mass producing the Flat Twin and Pawn Shop radars, though the ABM treaty limits them to two locations.

"Similarly, they are mass producing the SH-08, a relatively new supersonic missile that intercepts warheads within the atmos-

phere, with 500 such missiles already produced and 3,000 ultimately projected. The ABM treaty limits each side to only 100 interceptors of all types, and the Soviets also have the SH-04, which intercepts above the atmosphere, as well as other interceptors with both anti-aircraft and anti-missile capability."

"On arms control in general," the *Journal* pointed out, "the prospect of a Soviet ABM breakout raises once again the question of why we are negotiating new treaties with them when they are breaking the old ones."

Defense chief wants to close U.S. bases

Defense Secretary Frank Carlucci plans to set up a blue-ribbon commission to suggest foreign and domestic military bases for closing, the *Washington Times* reported on March 3. The commission, which would begin its work in November, will be headed by former Sen. Abraham Ribicoff (D-Conn.) and former Rep. Jack Edwards (R-Ala.).

Some congressmen were wary of the plan. "I don't think it makes any difference" what a commission proposes, said Rep. Ron Dyson (D-Md.), who added that any base closing decisions will be made in Congress. Dyson is a member of the House Armed Services Committee. Alaska Republican Sen. Ted Stevens cautioned Carlucci and the Pentagon to "slow down," adding that the base-closing initiative could damage Carlucci's relations with Congress.

Abrahamson: Budget cuts set back SDI timetable

At a Pentagon press conference on Feb. 29, called to discuss initial data from the recent Delta 181 space experiment, Lt. Gen. James Abrahamson, the director of the Strategic Defense Initiative Organization (SDIO), reported that budget cuts had delayed a decision to begin developing an SDI-style missile defense by one to two years, and had pushed back the earliest possible deploy-

Briefly

ment to "slightly after" the mid-1990s.

Data from the Feb. 8 Delta 181 space experiment showed that it will be easier than originally thought for a missile defense system to pick out its targets. "My assessment is, it's going to be easier" than predicted to discriminate between real and false warheads, said Army Maj. Andrew Green, who directed the Feb. 8 mission. Data from the Delta 181 are still being transmitted to ground stations and have not yet been fully analyzed.

Defense Secretary Frank Carlucci, on the other hand, has ordered a full-scale review of the SDI program to make sure it is "structured" correctly and has "reasonable goals"—in view of budget constraints.

Next President should aim for man on Mars

The United States needs a space-oriented president who wants to put men on Mars, says an op-ed in the *Houston Chronicle* Feb. 28. Its author was space expert Alcestis Oberg, wife of aerospace engineer James Oberg, currently working in the Space Shuttle program, and an expert on the Soviet space program. Alcestis Oberg has co-authored a book on space with her husband, and several of her own.

"Beware any candidate who doesn't have a space policy and refuses to say much of anything about it because it's not a 'major issue,'" she writes. "This is uninformed nonsense. . . . Beware, too, the candidate who says we have to solve the problems on Earth before we do anything about space. More nonsense. . . . Beware the candidate who suggests we go hand-in-hand to Mars with the Russians to promote international brotherhood and peace. Poppycock. . . . Beware the candidate who says he's going to change the leadership of NASA. This is a false issue. . . . Beware the candidate who says he's for heavy-lift vehicles, for Earth-monitoring projects, for commercialization of space, but nothing more. That's actually less than the space policy we have now, and is guaranteed to keep the space program anemic.

"Who is the ideal presidential candidate, as far as space policy is concerned? For my

money, he would be a blend of John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson: An eloquent visionary and, at the same time, a practical, 'push-these-programs-through-Congress-or-else' doer. . . . My space ideal would articulate a bold new goal, probably a manned mission to Mars, in full knowledge that nobody will land there during his presidency, but also knowing that the technologies invented to get us there would serve us for any project in the inner solar system in the century to come. . . . He wouldn't be afraid to aim for it.

He would promise to forge a new alliance between government, academia, and industry. . . . This would require some really new and visionary strategy. But it would go far toward improving our economic and educational posture in the world. . . . I dream of a leader who will pick up Kennedy's torch . . . and carry it forward into what we all wish will be a future full of opportunities, full of hope."

Space commander wants to ban space arms?

At a forum on space and national security at the Brookings Institution, Navy Vice Adm. William E. Ramsey, the deputy director of the U.S. Space Command, declared that a U.S.-Soviet treaty banning weapons from space was "a damn worthy goal," the *Washington Post* reported. "I think we should negotiate toward . . . no weapons in space," Ramsey said. "We should have as a national objective . . . an environment in space where weapons are not introduced."

Ramsey is vice commander of the North American Aerospace Defense Command as well as a deputy commander of the Space Command in Colorado Springs, Colo. In February, the command was assigned tentative responsibility for operating the potential U.S. missile shield being developed by the SDIO.

The confused admiral said he saw no conflict between his support for a space weapons ban and his potential responsibility for operating SDI weapons, saying: "I strongly favor continued research on SDI, which . . . has kept the Soviets at the negotiating table."

● **CASPAR WEINBERGER** has joined the 275-lawyer firm of Rogers & Wells, a firm spokesman announced from New York Feb. 29. The firm is headed by former Secretary of State William P. Rogers. The announcement said the former defense secretary "will not engage in any work involving federal government or defense contracts or any matters involving the Defense Department in any way." The firm specializes in international law and finance.

● **RONALD REAGAN** had another embarrassing moment at the NATO summit in Brussels March 3. Asked what he thought of the final communiqué, he said, "Haven't read it yet." Chief of Staff Howard Baker nudged him, and said they had read it the night before, and thought it was fine. "It's fine," the President said, turning back to the press.

● **AIR FORCE** Gen. Robert T. Herres, told a Brookings forum on space and national security in Washington that "chances are we would like to see" a negotiated limit on space weapons, if not a ban." Herres, who is vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, also said that Paul Nitze's proposal to negotiate limits on SDI research was "not without merit . . . has some interesting ramifications," and "certainly should not be summarily cast aside."

● **JACK KEMP**, GOP presidential hopeful, announced March 3 that he would work for the repeal of the Panama Canal treaty, which is to give Panama control of the Canal Zone in the year 2000.

● **IOWA'S CITIES**, 68% of them, lost population during the 1980s; the same proportion grew in the 1970s. Among the hardest hit by the depopulation caused by the farm crisis was Cedar Falls, which declined by 9% from its 1980 census count.