

Notes & Briefs

Shifting Fat, Panhandling Robots, Facebook Depression, etc.

The *New Atlantis* notes with sadness the passing of our contributor Jonathan Brin Tucker (1954–2011). An esteemed and prolific expert in arms control and nonproliferation policy, specializing in chemical and biological weapons, he served in the U.S. government in several capacities, and was a biological-weapons inspector with the United Nations in Iraq in the 1990s. He also worked at several think tanks and advocacy groups, and was the author or editor of numerous books, including, most recently, *War of Nerves: Chemical Warfare from World War I to Al-Qaeda* (2006). Mr. Tucker also wrote and edited many articles and reports, both for expert and lay readers. His final essay for *The New Atlantis*, “Could Terrorists Exploit Synthetic Biology?,” which was published in our Spring 2011 issue, typifies the care and deliberation that char-

acterized all his work. He possessed, as the *Washington Post*’s obituarist put it, “a scientist’s probing mind and a policy wonk’s fluency on national security issues”; a close colleague described him as a “humble giant” of his field. R.I.P.

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We also mark the passing of three important figures in U.S. science policy. John Harmen “Jack” Marburger III, science adviser to President George W. Bush, died on July 28, 2011 at the age of 70. A respected physicist and administrator, Marburger held a number of academic and research posts—including president of Stony Brook University and head of Brookhaven National Laboratory—before becoming director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. His tenure saw no end of controversies, as the Bush administration was

accused of being “anti-science,” and Marburger was himself the target of vitriol his predecessors never faced. But Marburger (a lifelong Democrat) defended the administration, carefully distinguishing between the claims of scientific fact and the moral and political priorities that guide governance. “No one will know my personal positions on issues as long as I am in this job,” he told an interviewer in 2005. “I am here to make sure that the science input to policymaking is sound and that the executive branch functions properly with respect to its science and technology missions.”

Emilio Quincy “Mim” Daddario, father of the now-defunct congressional Office of Technology Assessment (OTA), died on July 7, 2010 at the age of 91. He was a young lawyer when he enlisted in the Army to serve in the Second World War; he received the Legion of Merit and the Bronze Star for his exploits in Italy. In 1946, Daddario was elected mayor of Middletown, Connecticut, at the age of 28, and the next year he participated in a minor aviation stunt: the first time a helicopter ever landed on an American street. (The chopper landed in front of city hall, Daddario got in, it flew to a nearby department store, and he got out.) He then served for two years as a judge before being called back to uniform in Korea. In 1958, Daddario was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, chairing numerous science subcommittees during his six terms, including one focused on the Apollo moon missions.

His tireless advocacy for a way of better informing legislators about technological advancement resulted directly in the creation of OTA in 1972, and so Congress asked Daddario—who by this point had left the House—to work as the agency’s first director. In a 2004 interview with *The New Atlantis*, he lamented the agency’s 1995 shuttering: “I regret that it didn’t continue. I think there’s a need throughout government...to study technologies, the way they develop, the way they are integrated into our society, and the way they are applied.”

Daddario’s successor at OTA was Russell Wilbur Peterson. A Ph.D. chemist, Peterson in 1942 took a job at the DuPont company, where he spent more than two decades; he helped develop Dacron and eventually became director of R&D. Moving into politics, he served as governor of Delaware from 1969 to 1973, garnering a reputation as an activist liberal Republican (a species now extinct). A dedicated environmentalist, he chaired the Council on Environmental Quality under Presidents Nixon and Ford. He then followed Emilio Daddario at OTA. In a 2004 interview with *The New Atlantis*, Peterson recounted clashing with members of Congress from both political parties to protect OTA’s reputation for objectivity. In 1979, he left the agency to assume the presidency of the National Audubon Society, staying in that post until 1985. He frequently fought with the Reagan administration over environmental regulations, and later became an activist against nucle-

ar weapons. In the 1990s, Peterson switched to the Democratic Party, and in 2003 he self-published a book accusing conservatives of launching “a full-scale attack on the way of life Americans have created over many decades.” Peterson passed away on February 21, 2011 at the age of 94.

The college to which all parents supposedly aspire to send their children has admitted that the aspiration to send all children to college may have actually harmed a great many of them. “Pathways to Prosperity,” a report published by Harvard University’s Graduate School of Education in February 2011, notes that college degrees are unnecessary for many occupations, and argues that idealizing them may have driven many young people of all aptitudes away from vocational training and fruitful careers. Financial security and stimulating work can be found in careers off the ivy-grown path—as readers of the book *Shop Class as Soulcraft* by our *New Atlantis* colleague Matthew B. Crawford know well.

United Nations biodiversity chief Ahmad Djoghlaif is among the latest voices decrying young people’s obsessive attachment to their screens. Speaking at a forum in Manila in May 2011, Djoghlaif warned that television and computers are preventing children from developing a connection to nature. He pointed to studies that claim that children in developed countries spend 95 percent of their free time in

front of screens, arguing it is a central obstacle to the future of conservation efforts, and asking, “How can you protect something you’ve never seen?”

Liposuction, the cosmetic surgery that removes fat from parts of the body, does not do so lastingly, according to a study published in *Nature* in July 2011. University of Colorado researchers found that undergoing liposuction ultimately only moves the location of fat within the body: while the treated area remains lipid-depleted, the body regenerates in other areas whatever amount was removed—specifically, fat removed from the thighs and lower abdomen reappears on the upper abdomen, shoulders, and triceps. This surprising discovery is a reminder of the complexity of the human body, and of its potential resistance to our efforts to remake it however we wish.

Even panhandlers now face competition from technology: robots that beg. The *Chronicle of Philanthropy* reports that the M.I.T. Media Lab, in collaboration with researchers from Carnegie Mellon, has developed “urban donation-motivating robots” that are designed to wave and bow to solicit donations for charities. The knee-high bots call out “hello, hello, hello” as they meander down the street, responding to contributors with “thank you, thank you, thank you.” The robots might someday replace the street fundraising projects that many organizations now use. The success of the early experiments can probably just be chalked up

to the novelty of seeing robots walking the sidewalks—although perhaps eliminating actual human encounters is just the thing to get people on the street to care about humanitarian causes.

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In “Proportionality in Warfare” (Spring 2010), *New Atlantis* contributor Keith Pavlischek argued that critics of Israel’s conduct in the Gaza War of 2008 and 2009 misunderstood and distorted the just war principle of proportionality, falsely conflating it with the common English usage of the word to mean “tit for tat.” One of the major figures to make this error was Richard Goldstone, author of the 2009 United Nations report that said, among other things, that Israeli military personnel targeted Palestinian civilians as a matter of policy. But Goldstone has now recanted. In an April 2011 op-ed in the *Washington Post*, he gutted his own report, saying that he had only claimed that Palestinian civilian deaths were intentional because he “had no evidence on which to draw any other reasonable conclusion,” but that subsequent inves-

tigations “indicate that civilians were not intentionally targeted as a matter of policy.” He added, “If I had known then what I know now, the Goldstone Report would have been a different document.” Goldstone’s reckless rush to condemn Israel produced a report that has become a major tool of anti-Israel propaganda; his too-little-too-late confession should make us wary of accepting the claims of future international investigators hasty to draw false equivalences and point to easy villains.

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Neologism watch: The American Academy of Pediatrics has recast an old vice with a new name, warning in early 2011 of a syndrome called “Facebook Depression.” The problem is caused by, as one reporter put it, “being bombarded with friend tallies, status updates, and photos of people happy, having the time of their lives, when you are not.” To combat social-network-based envy, perhaps teenagers should keep in mind that people—other teens especially—often craft their online portraits so as to appear happier and more popular than they are in real life.