

# national

## Gene splicing under scrutiny

**United Press International**  
WASHINGTON — Scientists say fears that advancements in genetic engineering soon could influence human intelligence and personality are preposterous, but a presidential commission is proposing continued close scrutiny of gene splicing.

The President's Commission for the Study of Ethical Problems in Medicine and Biomedical and Behavioral Research told a House subcommittee Tuesday that fears of people being turned into Frankenstein monsters by genetic engineering were exaggerated.

The House Science and

Technology oversight subcommittee was to hear the concerns of various religious organizations about genetic engineering on Wednesday.

The presidential commission recommended continued oversight of genetic engineering by a commission of public and private volunteers, or a permanent official body.

"Whatever format is chosen, the group should be broadly based and not dominated by genetics specialists or other scientists," it said.

Commission members said while objections to "playing God" deserve serious attention,

they are "not persuaded the scientific procedures in question are inherently inappropriate for human use."

It said, "Especially close scrutiny is appropriate for any procedures that would create inheritable genetic changes or that are aimed at enhancing 'normal' people, as opposed to remedying recognized genetic defects."

Dr. Richard Axel, of Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons, said Tuesday, "The idea of introducing genes into humans has conjured up frightening and unnatural scenarios."

But, he said, "I do not anticipate successful gene transfer into the nervous system or into the skin, for that matter, in the near future."

Axel said it would be unethical not to use genetic engineering to eliminate symptoms of many genetic diseases.

David Jackson, chief scientific officer of Genex Corp. in Gaithersburg, Md., said the idea that scientists could use gene splicing to manipulate "complex human characteristics such as intelligence, aggressiveness, personality, good looks, and so forth in the foreseeable future — is simply preposterous."

Committee Chairman Al Gore Jr., D-Tenn., said he probably will recommend creation of a permanent federal commission to act as a watchdog over genetic engineering technology.

Alexander Capron, the presidential commission's executive director, said although religious leaders were concerned perceiving a lack of government oversight, he has not heard in the gene splicing now being planned or undertaken the "fundamental danger" to human values, social norms or ethical principles that alarmed them.

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Train hearings continue

## Rehiring disturbs officials

**United Press International**  
One might expect that since humans are so biologically complex, they'd have more DNA than lower organisms. Not so. Both lillies and salamanders have about 20 times as much per cell. But most may be excess baggage. In fact, no one even knows why it's there.

**United Press International**  
BATON ROUGE, La. — The chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board says it is "disturbing" that the engineer and brakeman of a derailed train had each been fired twice before the disaster.

At a hearing Tuesday into the Sept. 28 derailment and explosion of a chemical train in Livingston, La., NTSB chairman Jim Burnett expressed concern about the spotty job records of Illinois Central Gulf Railroad engineer Edward Peyton

Robertson and brakeman Russell Reeves.

"It's disturbing to me that we have that kind of people with that kind of record handling a hazardous material train," he said.

Robertson, 42, had been fired for dereliction of duty, including drinking on call, and had been reprimanded for several incidents, including one that resulted in a collision between locomotives.

Reeves, 31, who railroad medical officials once said had an eye defect severe enough to "probably disqualify a brakeman," had been fired for indictments for selling drugs. Records show ICG officials found methadone in his urine in 1969 and recommended future spot checks for drugs.

Earlier testimony revealed an ICG clerk, Janet Brumfield Byrd, 34, who said she was "along for the ride," was at the controls when the train derailed, forcing evacuation of 2,700 people for two weeks. She said

Robertson and Reeves were drunk and kept falling asleep.

After the derailment, he arrested Robertson, Reeves Byrd and charged them with reckless handling of hazardous wastes. They were fired by railroad for speeding and drinking while on call.

Burnett asked railroad officials not to be upset about the latest firing cause he could be rehired.

"Will any of these people re-employed?" Burnett asked. "I have no idea at this point whether they will be employed or not," Stearns responded. "I have enough confidence in my management that they will make the right decision."


Job records showed Robertson and Reeves were related to other ICG employees and had been rehired on a "lenient basis."

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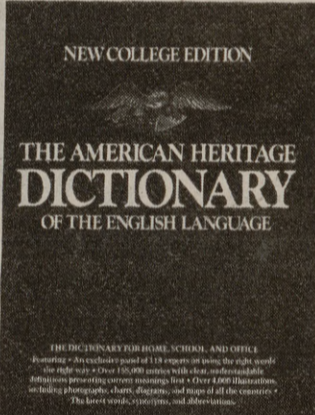
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## 'Woody' goes to Smithsonian

**United Press International**  
WASHINGTON — If the Gallup Poll were to conduct a survey to determine the five most popular movie cartoon characters in cinema history, Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Bugs Bunny, Popeye and Woody Woodpecker surely would be high up on the list.

However, only one — Woody Woodpecker — has been honored with an exhibit at the Smithsonian Institution.

That distinction was recorded Tuesday when 17 Woody Woodpecker artifacts went on display in the Smithsonian's Museum of American History.

They are now part of the popular-entertainment collection along with the ruby slippers Judy Garland wore in "The Wizard of Oz" and the jailhouse door from the set of the "Barney Miller" television series.

The Woody Woodpecker objects were donated to the museum by Walter Lantz, 82, pioneer animated film producer who created the first W.W. cartoon in 1940.

As Lantz tells it, he got the idea on his honeymoon. A real woodpecker kept waking up the

newlyweds early in the morning by rapping on their cottage roof, he said.

The bride, actress Grace Stafford, became the voice of Woody. Her specialty, which has done countless times in the 30 years of dubbing, is the famous woodpecker laugh.

In all, Lantz produced about 400 Woody Woodpecker cartoons, a feat described by Douglas Evelyn, the museum's deputy director, as "a truly professional accomplishment."

In accepting "a gift of great significance," Evelyn did not indicate why the Smithsonian honored an animated woodpecker rather than, say, a mouse, a cat or a rabbit.

It could be that Walt Disney creations are legally restricted amusement park promotion. Woody Woodpecker has never been associated with a venture of that sort, although he was the subject of a 1947 hit song.

For Walter Lantz, the Smithsonian ceremony was the highlight of 55 years of work for the same studio.

"I've won all sorts of awards," he said, "but never anything like this."

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