

# SCIENCE NEWS®

The Weekly Newsmagazine of Science

A Science Service Publication  
Volume 130, No. 5, August 2, 1986

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Subscription Department  
231 West Center Street, Marion, Ohio 43305

Subscription rate: 1 yr., \$29.50; 2 yrs., \$50.00.  
(Foreign postage \$5.00 additional per year.) Change of  
address: Four to six weeks' notice is required. Please  
state exactly how magazine is to be addressed.  
Include zip code. For new subscriptions only call  
(1) 800-247-2160. Printed in U.S.A. Second class  
postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional  
mailing offices. Title registered as trademark U.S. and  
Canadian Patent Offices. Published every Saturday by  
SCIENCE SERVICE, Inc., 1719 N St., N.W.,  
Washington, D.C. 20036. (202-785-2255)  
ISSN 0036-8423

## Commentary

## A Thank-You to Our Subscribers

The four largest science magazines — DISCOVER, SCIENCE 86, SCIENCE DIGEST and SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN — all have circulations over 500,000 and all have been having financial problems. In fact, the losses of SCIENCE 86, published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and of SCIENCE DIGEST, published by Hearst Corp., have been so severe that both have been sold to Time, Inc. (publisher of DISCOVER) and folded. And SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN has been sold to German publishing company Verlagsgruppe Georg von Holtzbrink but will continue publication.

SCIENCE NEWS, with a circulation of roughly one-third that of the smallest of the big four, is financially healthy. This all raises an interesting question: Why don't we have the problems of those large monthlies?

There are many reasons, but by far the most important is that SCIENCE NEWS is a subscriber-supported magazine, i.e., a magazine whose subscriptions support virtually the entire cost of editorial, promotion, printing, distribution and over-

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our magazine well enough to pay the subscription price required to make up for the lack of an advertising subsidy. Demographics and lifestyle of the subscribers don't matter to us, and we care not whether you are male or female, what your income level is, whether you intend to buy cameras or stereos, whether you drink vodka or whether you travel a lot.

Do our subscribers like SCIENCE NEWS? As somebody noted recently, subscribers don't give awards, so we can't use that measure. But there is one good indicator — the subscription renewal rate. The SCIENCE NEWS renewal rate, as determined by the Audit Bureau of Circulation, is 64.55 percent, one of the highest in the United States for general-circulation magazines. In fact, most general-circulation magazines have such a low renewal rate that they do not even publish the figures.

And so to you subscribers, we would like to say thank you. We think we have a good magazine, and we are glad that you think so too. For you make it possible for us to survive in the stormy seas of general science magazine publishing. We are grateful. — E. G. Sherburne Jr., Publisher