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Cover: *Argyroxiphium sandwicense macrocephalum*, a Hawaiian silversword that lives on the slopes of Maui's Haleakala volcano, flowers only once and then dies. Evolutionary biologists have traced Hawaii's silverswords to a California ancestor — a finding that challenges scientists' assumptions about the origins of plants on islands and continents around the world. (Photo: Gerald D. Carr/University of Hawaii)

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Letters

Misleading wording?

In "A radical mechanism for methane buildup" (SN: 2/23/91, p.116), you state that Jim Kao and Xuexi Tie "announced their finding in a press release," an unfortunate wording that could mislead your readers about the scientists' actions and intentions.

The Los Alamos National Laboratory researchers announced their finding in December at the Symposium on Global Tracer Transport Models, sponsored by the United Nations World Meteorological Organization. In February, the public information office at Los Alamos issued a press release to call attention to the public presentation of a significant research result.

It is common practice to use the presentation of new findings at a scientific conference as the "peg" on which to hang a story. Your writer's choice to play up the press release and to include other researchers' comments that the Los Alamos work has not yet appeared in a peer-reviewed journal, if applied uniformly to all SCIENCE NEWS articles, could discount much

of the research you report.

John R. Gustafson
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It's common practice at SCIENCE NEWS to describe reactions of outside experts to new research findings, whether or not the findings have appeared in a peer-reviewed journal. In this case, several atmospheric scientists specifically cited the public announcement of Kao and Tie's unusual results before rigorous peer review as one of several reasons for their skepticism. In the preceding paragraph, the article clearly states that the Los Alamos researchers first discussed their findings at a climate symposium in December.

— the editors

Rosy request carries thorns

The only way "scientists can bask in the President's rosy-hued funding requests" ("President's budget: Rosy outlook for R&D," SN: 2/9/91, p.87) is if we put on rose-colored glasses.

While the proposed budget offers some

long-overdue increases to a few programs, most scientists have little to celebrate when the largest slice of the R&D pie — 53 percent — is devoted to military research projects. In comparison, NIH and NSF funds, which are the cornerstone of U.S. basic research, make up only 8.8 percent of the budget. This R&D budget continues the policies of the past decade by favoring military hardware over medical research, development of alternative energy sources or environmental protection.

Scientists should also look at the President's proposed cuts in education funding if they wish to gauge the impact of the '92 budget on science overall. A 30 percent cut in Guaranteed Student Loans, a 36 percent cut in College Work Study and cuts in numerous granting programs (the overall real decrease in education dollars is 18 percent) do not bode well for the next generation of U.S. researchers.

A budget that gives defense R&D twice the dollar increase it gives to civilian R&D is not rosy, it's rotten.

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