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Science Service, which publishes SCIENCE NEWS, is a nonprofit corporation founded in 1921. It gratefully accepts tax-deductible contributions and bequests to assist its efforts to increase the public understanding of science, with special emphasis on young people. More recently, it has included in its mission increasing scientific literacy among members of underrepresented groups. Through its Youth Programs it administers the International Science and Engineering Fair, the Science Talent Search for the Westinghouse Science Scholarships, and publishes and distributes the *Directory of Student Science Training Programs for Precollege Students*.

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Letters

Ozone assessment found wanting

"Ozone on Trial" (SN: 10/7/95, p. 238) reports on an adversarial congressional hearing but fails to provide the balance your readers are entitled to.

The story quotes as if it were true an attempt by Congresswoman Lynn Rivers to impugn my credentials as a witness but does not record my response. It quotes me telling the panel that Robert Watson's presentation was misleading but does not explain how or why. I testified that there is no credible evidence for a long-term, increasing trend of ultraviolet radiation.

The story refers to several scientists skeptical about ozone depletion but identifies only "statisticians for some CFC producers." It claims that these statisticians now agree with Watson's ozone assessment panel. Nowhere does the story point out that their employer, Allied-Signal, like other former CFC producers, is now in the lucrative business of selling

CFC substitutes.

SCIENCE NEWS should inform its readers of the substantive scientific controversies that should be settled before policy actions that would waste upward of \$100 billion are put into effect. Regrettably, the much-touted *International Assessment of Ozone Depletion: 1994* does not squarely address dissenting views.

S. Fred Singer
President

*The Science & Environmental Policy Project
Fairfax, Va.*

Vitamin A link to homeobox genes?

With regard to the article "Excess Vitamin A Causes Birth Defects" (SN: 10/14/95, p. 244), it has been known for several years that retinoic acid, a metabolite of vitamin A, seriously affects the expression of homeobox genes, which control the development of the head, face, and central nervous system. Oddly enough, the effects in vitro and in vivo are markedly different.

The homeobox genes are the same genes

referred to in "Nobel prize for genes that shape embryos" (p. 246).

Gordon Serjak
North Miami, Fla.

New theory conceived

"Secret to birds' mating score: Speedy sperm" (SN: 10/7/95, p. 231) might go a long way toward explaining why supposedly "infertile" human couples suddenly have kids after they adopt a child.

These couples often attribute the event to becoming more relaxed. Instead, maybe overly anxious human couples try to have sex too often and too soon before the woman's fertile period, and the man's sperm count is too low by the time the woman ovulates.

Once the couple again engages in sexual intercourse on a sporadic basis, the man's sperm count is much higher. Consequently, the sperm are speedier and harder, leading to a greater chance of conception.

Richard Oldrieve
Westlake, Ohio