

# Experts show how public health is vulnerable to bioterrorism

By Laurie Garrett, Newsday

WASHINGTON — Public health infrastructures in the United States and Canada, in their current states, would be devastated by a "high-impact" bioterrorism event in which an attacker uses modern germ technology, officials said last week.

A telltale scenario, role-played by public health experts using smallpox as the biological agent involved and epidemic response plans similar to those in many American cities, left 15,000 people dead over two months and 80 million dead within a year, primarily because of insufficient global vaccine supplies.

"We blew it," said Dr. Michael Ascher, a California health official, one of a number of experts asked to make decisions as the scenario played out. "It clearly got out of control. Whatever planning we had ... it didn't work. I think this is the harsh reality, what would happen." The scenario was explored last week in a daylong exercise attended by more than 1,000 public health leaders from both countries, part of a two-day seminar on the issue organized by experts from the Center for Civilian Biodefense Studies at Johns

Hopkins University in Baltimore.

The seminar came just weeks after President Clinton announced that \$158 million was being allocated to the Department of Health and Human Services this year for research and preparedness in bioterrorism defense and that Congress would be asked for \$230 million next year. One of the first expenditures is for a stockpile of vaccines and treatments that communities could get quickly, Donna Shalala, the Health and Human Services secretary, has said.

The scenario involved a visit by the American vice president to a northeastern university on April 1. Eleven days later, a 20-year-old student who heard the vice president speak shows up in the university hospital's emergency room with flu-like symptoms, including high fever, muscle aches, fatigue and a headache. Under the scenario, the student is sent home with aspirin and told to rest and drink lots of fluids.

Two days later, the young woman returns to the hospital, now fighting for her life. And a university janitor who cleaned up after the vice president's speech displays the same symptoms. By 6 p.m. that night, April 13, the hospital infectious diseases

expert is ready to voice an outrageous conclusion: Both patients have smallpox, which can be spread through the air and kills one-third of those it infects.

Since smallpox officially was eradicated in 1977, with only a few samples under lock and key in Atlanta and Siberia, there is one conclusion: Someone gained access to those samples and released the virus in an attack aimed at the vice president.

By June 15, more than 15,000 people would have died of smallpox worldwide under the scenario, which uses growth rates from historic epidemics as a model. And the disease would be out of control in 14 nations. Also by then, the experts concluded, virtually all global vaccine supplies would be depleted.

As the scenario continued to unfold, other nations would decide to close their borders, barring Americans from entering their countries. And in the affected city, the National Guard would impose martial law over 2 million residents. The final tally? Top experts say such an attack, theoretically, might kill 80 million people worldwide within 12 months.

"We would be irresponsible if we didn't remedy this," Jerome Hauer,

New York City's chief of emergency responses, said in reaction to the scenario. "We've got to move this (planning) forward." In choosing smallpox as the lethal microbe, the Johns Hopkins experts opted for a worst case test. Vaccination for smallpox stopped in North America in 1972 and globally in 1977.

Only 7 million doses of stockpiled smallpox vaccine remain in the United States. And less than 10 percent of those who were vaccinated still have ample immunity against the virus to protect them, said Dr. D.A. Henderson of Johns Hopkins. And, of course, no one born after 1971 in the United States has been vaccinated. Other, less awesome microbial threats, such as the bacteria anthrax, tularemia and brucella, also worried those gathered at the Washington meeting.

"We have a lot of work to do ..." said Dr. Margaret Hamburg, an assistant HHS secretary. "Having been the health commissioner of New York City during the World Trade Center bombing, I have no doubt that terrorism is a reality. I have no doubt that if we want to be responsible we have to take this seriously." Already HHS and local

health departments are facing a deluge of hoax attacks, typically threatening release or claiming to have posted an anthrax-releasing device.

Jessica Stern of the Council on Foreign Relations said she has compiled details of 47 such anthrax hoaxes since 1992 in the United States. In most cases the hoaxes were limited to notes claiming, "You have been exposed to anthrax," often directed at racially or anti-semitically inspired targets or abortion clinics. But authorities took the threats seriously: They have conducted full decontamination of some 2,000 people connected to those 47 incidents, brought containment-suited emergency personnel to the sites and often created genuine local panic.

Earlier this month the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued recommendations for handling bioweapons hoaxes, suggesting that authorities try to play down their responses so as not to encourage thrill-seeking, malevolent individuals. "When an envelope comes in saying, 'This is anthrax,' we don't need the fire department in full protective gear on site," Hamburg

said. "What we need is to discreetly move the envelope to a laboratory for appropriate analysis."

Hamburg's office is trying to develop guidelines for handling hoaxes, forge stronger links between public health and law enforcement agencies and encourage research and development of a national stockpile of appropriate vaccines and antibiotics. "The danger is we don't want public health identified with the CIA and FBI activities," Hamburg said. "Particularly in terms of global infectious disease surveillance. We in public health need to have public trust and confidence, it's crucially important. We have to find the right balance."

In such a scenario it is highly unlikely the terrorists responsible for global mass homicide would ever be caught anyway, said Robert Blitzer, retired FBI chief of counterterrorism. "It's very slim" odds, Blitzer said, that anyone would claim credit for such a dastardly deed or leave an easy trail of clues that might allow them to be quickly tracked down.

# Popular film critic Gene Siskel dies at 53

By Eric Slater, Los Angeles Times

CHICAGO — Gene Siskel, who along with partner Roger Ebert brought film criticism to the masses with their weekly television program and ingeniously concise thumbs-up, thumbs-down rating system, died here Saturday at the age of 53.

Fondly referred to by fans as "the skinny one" to distinguish him from his portly cohort Ebert, Siskel underwent surgery in May to remove a growth from his brain, but quickly returned to the syndicated "Siskel & Ebert at the Movies" TV show and to his four other jobs, as film critic for the Chicago Tribune, TV Guide,

"CBS This Morning" and WBBM-TV in Chicago.

Then, earlier this month, he announced he was taking time off to rest and further recuperate from the surgery. But, in characteristically sly humor, he predicted a swift return: "I'm in a hurry to get well because I don't want Roger to get more screen time than I. Also, this experience will give me a chance to work out my left thumb, the stunt double." He died at Evanston Hospital, north of Chicago, surrounded by his family.

"Gene was a lifelong friend, and our professional competition only strengthened that bond," Ebert said in a statement. "He showed great

bravery in the months after his surgery, continuing to work as long as he could. "As a critic, he was passionate and exacting. As a husband and a father, his love knew no bounds."

A native of Chicago, Siskel earned his bachelor's degree at Yale University in 1967 and returned home and began writing for the Tribune in 1969. He first hooked up with Ebert, film critic for the rival Chicago Sun-Times, in 1975 on the public television program "Sneak Previews."

In 1982, their program went into syndication, and the two began joyfully bickering and blustering their

way to fame, at the same time largely molding popular movie criticism, moving the once-esoteric genre from the arts pages of newspapers into millions of living rooms.

Derided by some students of film as easy, pop criticism, Siskel once defended the program as "the distillation between the two of us of 39 years of writing about movies." Genteel, but with a cutting sarcasm, the balding, wiry Siskel was as outspoken and opinionated about movie-makers as he was about movies.

He criticized the Oscars as overrated awards, suggesting Academy Award nominations were

for sale to the filmmaker with the biggest advertising budget. He suggested film critics were more qualified to pick Oscar nominees than members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. After all, he said, the critics have seen all the movies.

In 1995, he took on anti-Hollywood politicians, lambasting then-presidential candidate Bob Dole for a major speech Dole had delivered in Los Angeles accusing Hollywood and music labels of marketing "nightmares of depravity" and "mainstreaming deviancy."

"No one on Planet Earth has knocked American movies more than me, 52

weeks a year, 26 years," he said. "I wish movies were better, more than you. You go to one movie a month, I go to six a week."

But, he said, Dole was practicing disingenuous politics when he blamed movies for serious cultural problems. "When it diverts the national agenda from the real problems, when the same person is saying 'Cancel the violent movies but let's make sure we have plenty of assault weapons,' that's sinful, isn't it?" Siskel is survived by his wife and three children.

# Pete Wilson decides against run for presidency

By George Skelton, Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES, Calif. — Former California Gov. Pete Wilson has made his decision: It would be senseless to run again for president. He can't raise enough money to compete.

"I've reluctantly reached the conclusion that it's just not practical to pursue the nomination," he told the Los Angeles Times.

That's a harsh reality Wilson had suspected for some time, but needed to reaffirm for himself after leaving the governor's office Jan. 4. It didn't take him long. A few phone calls to loyal backers and two meetings with longtime strategists sufficed. "They thought it was very uphill," he says. So last Wednesday, he decided unequivocally to pull the plug.

Later, he talked about his decision during an interview in the high-rise Los Angeles office that he subleases from Ronald Reagan. "I don't like to temporize," he says, explaining why he's announcing his decision now rather than waiting in hopes of catching a lucky break, perhaps a front-runner like Texas Gov. George W. Bush opting not to run. "Confront it and get it over with."

"I don't pretend I'm not disappointed," he adds. "But life goes on and there's much to do and much to enjoy and I intend to do both." He'll become a visiting fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institution, a conservative think tank. It's also his intention to head up two committees, one promoting political causes and the other advocating public policy. He'll make money by joining some corporate boards. And he plans to write a book, "part memoir, part prescription."

Things would be different, Wilson agrees, if he hadn't already run once for president and fallen on his face. His face now would be fresh. When he ran in 1995, throat surgery

also angered California Republicans by running after promising not to, and for being willing to turn over his office to a Democrat, Lt. Gov. Gray Davis, Wilson's now paying for those sins.

The irony is that the 2000 presidential race is set up ideally for a former California governor, especially a Republican. The state's GOP primary is, winner-take-all, offering the largest bloc of national convention delegates. More important, California's primary next year will be among the earliest, providing some candidate with instant credibility, if not an insurmountable lead.

The problem, in Wilson's view, is that roughly 10 other states also are planning to hold their primaries the same day as California, March 7. They include New York, Massachusetts, Maryland, Florida and possibly New Jersey. "It's going to be a real television shootout," Wilson says. "You'll have to be on the air in L.A., San Francisco, New York, Boston, Philadelphia.... That's about a \$15 million tab. It's horrendously expensive. So Round 1 is likely to be a knockout."

Candidates, unless they're self-financed, like publisher Steve Forbes, also are handicapped by an archaic campaign contribution limit of \$1,000 per person. "That means 15,000 separate, maximum contributions," Wilson calculates. "That's crazy. Wilson estimates he could raise \$5 million to \$7 million, but "that isn't going to do it."

"I think there are a lot of people who are talking about running who aren't being very realistic." Wilson's decision will have little impact on the Republican race, except for freeing up his faithful to support other candidates. He was barely a blip in national polls. Even in California, he badly trailed Bush.

# Survivors of rape go public

By Greg Krikorian, Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — It does not get much tougher than this, letting the whole world know something so personal, so painful that you may not have shared it with friends, even family. But Saturday morning, two dozen rape and molestation survivors assembled on a sound stage in Hollywood for an event that they hope will strip away the notion that they, and millions of others nationwide, are just victims.

"I am still learning to trust," Laurie Wolfe, 29, said, staring into a television camera and tugging at her sweater until its sleeves covered her hands like mittens.

Ever since she was molested at 9 by a male baby sitter, the Los Angeles receptionist said she has trusted women more than men. But for the

past two years, she said, she has had a good relationship with her boyfriend. And notwithstanding the awful memory of what happened, she said into the camera, she has moved on. "I am a survivor."

The "Survivors" public service announcement, filmed throughout the day and early evening Saturday, is slated to begin airing in Los Angeles next month. And while it eventually might be broadcast nationwide, the immediate goal of the spot is to draw attention to another unique event: the April 17 gathering at the Los Angeles Central Library of women who have survived rape and those, including authors and artists, who "have given them voice."

The event, organized by the survivors' group, The Rainbow Sisters Project, is coincides with Sexual Assault Awareness Month and draws attention to a crime that is a

national plague. Even as law enforcement authorities laud a drop in most violent crimes, rapes remain so prevalent that federal agencies reported last year that one in seven American women and one in 48 men have been raped in their lifetimes.

"What we are telling rape survivors is that they don't need to be ashamed by what happened, they don't need to be silenced by what happened," said Karen Pomer, co-chair of The Rainbow Sisters Project. "And this is an effort to hear from those who have survived."

Rosanna Hill, co-coordinator of The Rainbow Sisters Project, said the public service announcement was directed not only at those who have survived assault but those who have been spared. "Putting a face on the survivors humanizes it, personalizes it," said Hill. "If people could imagine that it was their sister or their mother,

it brings it closer to home and they can understand the crime."

"I am determined to dissolve this aura of shame," said Pam Spencer, as she took her place before the camera. At 53, Spencer is two decades passed a brutal rape and beating that occurred when she lived alone in Kansas.

To this day, Spencer said, she credits the "best acting job of my life" with saving her because she persuaded her attacker she would not call the police if he let her fall back asleep. And to this day, she added, she cannot shake the memory of a police detective callously asking her if she had been sexually gratified during her rape. "I still think about confronting him someday," she said, "I think I will."

# Rev. Jackson to lead march protesting police shooting

Los Angeles Times

The Rev. Jesse Jackson has announced that he and other activists would march Saturday in Riverside, Calif., to protest the shooting by police of a 19-year-old black woman.

Tyisha Miller had a gun in her possession as she sat in her car with a flat tire at a gas station in December. Police officers who arrived to investigate later claimed that Miller reached for her weapon. Four officers fired a total of 24 shots, killing her instantly.

Police critics allege that she posed no threat and that the officers acted aggressively because she was black. Jackson said he has asked to meet with U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno this week to request a federal investigation.

"Our purpose is to keep the pressure on," Jackson said in teleconference interview from his Operation Push headquarters in Chicago. "The point is, that we are not going away."

# Remains of 'last wild Indian' discovered in Smithsonian warehouse

By Beth Berselli, The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Ishi, the "last wild Indian of North America," emerged from the Northern California wilderness in 1911, starved and nearly naked, his appearance so frightening that the townspeople initially had him jailed. He quickly became famous as people learned his story, but upon his death in 1916, a mystery once solved led to a new one. The question now: What happened to Ishi's remains?

The answer to that 83-year-old riddle came last week when two academics said they had found the Yahi Indian's brain in a preservation tank in a Smithsonian Institution warehouse in Suitland, Md. The news delighted several Native American tribes who have struggled for years to locate all of Ishi's remains and bury them in his homeland.

"It's not so often that you get your

mystery solved," said a gleeful Nancy Rockafellar, a historian at the University of California-San Francisco who is responsible for the discovery along with Duke University anthropologist Orin Starn.

Generations of schoolchildren have learned about Ishi, who became a national sensation when he wandered out of the forest long after all of his tribesmen were thought to have been killed by white settlers or disease. At the time, he was believed to be in his late forties. Anthropologists eager to study Ishi secured his release from jail and took him to San Francisco, where he spent his final years as a living exhibit in a museum, demonstrating the making of bows and arrows and other Indian arts.

Upon his death, Ishi's body was cremated, but his brain was removed and preserved for scientific research. The ashes ended up in a cemetery

south of San Francisco, while the brain was held for a short time at UC-San Francisco before being sent to the Smithsonian.

In 1997, several Native American tribes in Butte County, Calif., began an aggressive push to get all of Ishi's remains returned to them. But they didn't know where his brain was, and they didn't want to bury the ashes without the brain. According to their Native American beliefs, the spirit of the dead cannot find peace unless his or her entire body is properly buried.

That's where Starn and Rockafellar came in. Rockafellar was trying to discover what happened to Ishi's brain in San Francisco when Starn stumbled across a series of archived letters detailing its transfer to the Smithsonian. A Smithsonian spokeswoman said this weekend that museum staff always knew they had Ishi's brain, they just didn't know anyone was looking for it.