

WHAT S NEW Robert L. Park Friday, 27 Jun 08 Washington, DC

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1. THE PRIZE: WILL \$300 MILLION BUY A BETTER BATTERY?

I told my class last year that if they invent a better battery they could save the world and become rich doing it. I neglected to explain how that would happen, but John McCain has a way. He proposes that we offer a prize for a better battery amounting to "one dollar for every for every man, woman and child in America." I m in! McCain figured the prize at \$300 million, but I just checked the Population Clock and he s \$4,450,595 short. Oops! In the time it took to type that the population went up another person, or another dollar depending on how you look at it. It does that about every 10 seconds. If I win the prize, I plan to sue McCain for the difference. To win the prize, McCain said, the battery must "leapfrog" commercially available batteries. How much is "a leapfrog"? The Oxford English Dictionary defines "leapfrog" as "surpass or overtake." The Financial Times explained that by "leapfrog," McCain means it must deliver power at 30 percent of current costs.

2. PEW FORUM: U.S. RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE SURVEY.

The latest findings of the respected Pew Forum s massive survey make it clear that we are an overwhelmingly religious people. Only 16 percent identify themselves as "unaffiliated" and only a tenth of those are atheists. The strongest predictor of a person s faith has always been the faith of their parents, but with interfaith marriages increasing, a quarter of adult Americans have switched to another religion. The greatest gain was in unaffiliated, but even among the unaffiliated 70 percent said they believe in God. The willingness of Americans to compartmentalize their beliefs, holding totally contradictory convictions in different spheres, is remarkable. Scientists accept as a given that behind every physical effect lies a physical cause. That seems to rule out supernatural causes, leaving gods with little to do.

3. SCIENCE BUDGET: SUPPLEMENTAL BILL IS A DISAPOINTMENT.

The feeble position of science in America today was evident in the \$186 billion supplemental war spending bill approved by the House last week. The last hope for those science agencies devastated by the appropriation, the supplemental bill that went to the Senate included only \$400M for science, less than half what was sought. The Senate, which previously

approved three times that, is expected to accept the House figure. By now thoroughly domesticated, the science community meekly expressed its gratitude.

4. MARS: THE PHOENIX LANDER FINDS GOOD SOIL, LITTLE WATER.

Nothing here for the Mars Society which planned to make rocket fuel for the return trip from the water they believed was abundant. Nor does it rule out the possibility that Mars supports, or once supported, life. That possibility should rule out human explorers because of the danger of contaminating Mars with Earth organisms. Never mind, the robots are doing great.

5. WINDMILL: GOVERNMENT REPORT DEFENDS COLLIDER.

You will recall the courageous assault of Don Quixote, alias Walter Wagner, and his loyal servant Sancho on the monstrous Large Hadron Collider. <http://bobpark.physics.umd.edu/WN08/wn040408.html> . The court set a hearing for September 2. Operation of the LHC is set to begin in two weeks.

THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND.

Opinions are the author's and not necessarily shared by the University of Maryland, but they should be.

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