

### 03-6-09 No Strings Attached to Good News

Physicists talk about string theory the way you and I would discuss the weather or a well-founded viewpoint of contemporary art. Sometimes their theories sound way out there. That does not concern me at all. It doesn't worry me because it is so crucially important to allow the thinking process to unfold, to proceed, to see where it goes. Sometimes it is futile to discuss the whys of a situation when we can move on to the hows. That's what physicists do best. They think about how things happen.

Creativity and play and making discoveries are very close siblings. We need that whole family, along with a team of practical problem solvers and financial managers to work together on this earth's most pressing problems and dilemmas.

It is looking like our President Obama is thinking along these lines, also. He has chosen two physicists to head two very important departments. Harvard Physicist, John P. Holdren will serve as Obama's Science Advisor and Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy. Holdren has talked a lot about climate change and can sound like a doomsday preacher. I hope he is ready to think and guide us on how we can respond to the current situation and how we can improve the future of our globe.

The second physicist chosen by Obama to lead our country's challenging exploration of renewable energy is Steven Chu to be the Secretary of the Department of Energy. I like Chu's "roll your sleeves up and let's get to work" attitude.

With all this celebrating of the physical sciences going on, it must be with elation, pride and confidence that the American Physical Society announces its latest PhysicsQuest kits. This year's educational kits use the comic book genre to tell the story of Nicola Tesla's successful use of alternating current (AC) in his attempt to outwit Thomas Edison's use of direct current (DC) as the method for lighting up the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. While reading the comic book, students will learn about light, magnetism and electricity.

The kits also provide guidance for experimental activities allowing students to solve mysteries. The story format is a well documented as a learning tool. Narrative gives place, connection and reason for otherwise unrelated events, allowing the learner to remember the information.

These science kits are free for the asking for middle school teachers. So, spread the news, for middle school classrooms are targeted as an age when many young people lose interest in science and we don't want that to happen if we can do anything to prevent it! After the class has conducted their experiments, results are entered online and they are automatically entered in a drawing for prizes.

Do you know a middle school student or teacher? Pass the word. The APS delivers these kits each year. They are fun and they just might make the difference in keeping our young people interested in science and there are no strings attached, even if we do live in an ultra stringy universe.

Hey, I've learned something already. I thought AC/DC was a rock band.

*Cathleen Drinan is the Health Agent for Halifax, MA. She thinks art and science are close cousins. What do you think? Contact her at 781 293 6768 or [cdrinan@town.halifax.ma.ma.us](mailto:cdrinan@town.halifax.ma.ma.us)*