

U.S. Agency Admits Aide Destroyed AIDS Test Files

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A Reagan administration top health official responsible for the government's development of the HIV blood test discarded official records before resigning five years ago, according to Secretary of Health and Human Services Louis Sullivan. The acknowledgement by Sullivan was a result of repeated questions from Rep. John Dingell (D-Mich.) regarding the lack of significant HHS documents detailing the continuing dispute with France over the invention of the HIV test. Former HHS Secretary Lowell Harmison played a key role in the government's patenting and licensing of the HIV test, developed by Dr. Robert Gallo of the National Institutes of Health. Furthermore, Harmison organized the government's response to the Pasteur Institute of Paris's challenge of the Gallo patent. The House Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee, which Dingell chairs, is attempting to determine who was in responsible for misstatements about Gallo's AIDS research that government lawyers made during the dispute with the French. HHS records provided to Dingell do not specify whether the files Harmison threw out included any of those sought by Dingell's staff. Harmison admitted to removing some "personal items" and discarding other documents, including "all files containing trade secret, proprietary or confidential information."

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