

editorial

Science advice—a full-time job

A vigorous effort is underway to strengthen considerably the science advisory apparatus for the White House, which was downgraded last year with the Administration's decision to abolish the Office of Science and Technology and make the position of Presidential Science Adviser a part-time activity of the director of the National Science Foundation. Proposals to restore the advisory system to at least its previous level of importance with an enhanced level of effectiveness have been spearheaded by the report of National Academy of Sciences *ad hoc* Committee on Science and Technology chaired by James Killian (see August, page 61). In its recent editorial entitled "The Science Gap," the *New York Times* agreed with the recommendations of the Killian report, noting that "From the energy crisis to Soviet MIRV multiple warhead missiles, the United States today is confronted by a plethora of dangers that with foresight might well have been headed off. Failure to perceive the true dimensions of these threats and to act upon them in time reflects, in part, the absence of an effective system for funneling top-grade scientific advice directly and quickly to the White House."

Of course scientists would be quick to point out that we have no magic solutions to offer for these and other major problems confronting society; however, it is obvious that national planning and policy-making activities are seriously hampered to the extent that they do not have the benefit of the best expert opinion that the scientific community can provide on these problems.

This was the point echoed at the recent Congressional hearings on this subject by witnesses that included the former science advisors and the presidents of scientific societies. Although the witnesses were unanimous in praising the efforts of the current science advisor, H. Guyford Stever, within the present two-hat structure, they questioned that this structure provided adequate contact with the White House. In looking ahead to possible remedies, not all witnesses agreed with details of the proposed new Council for Science and Technology outlined in the Killian report. But it is gratifying that there was general agreement that any new system should be stronger and broader in scope than the old system established in 1957 by President

Eisenhower. Thus the proposed Council for Science and Technology would be on a more equal footing with the Office of Management and Budget, routinely play a role in areas such as foreign policy and publish an annual report making public its findings and recommendations on significant developments in science and technology affecting national policy.

It is especially heartening to observe that Congress is following up with firm legislative proposals. Legislation introduced in the Senate by Senators Moss, Magnuson and Tunney to establish a new advisory apparatus has already been amended to incorporate the proposals of the Killian report. A similar bill is expected to be introduced in the House before the end of this session.

In this election year, now is a good time to contact personally your own Senator and Congressman and make them aware of the importance of this legislation to the best interests of the country.

In today's crisis-ridden world, making sure that the President's office is continually getting the best science advice possible must be recognized as a high-priority, full-time job—anything less needlessly handicaps the national effort.

Harold L. Davis