

Progress in Washington

The opening page of "State and Society" this month (page 61) features a "first" for PHYSICS TODAY—statements by the two major presidential candidates giving their views on issues of central concern to the physics community.

The statements are specific responses of the candidates to a written request (see news story) by William Fowler, president of The American Physical Society. The fact that the candidates' offices took time during this most crucial pre-election period to define their positions for our relatively small and specialized community indicates the high level of importance both candidates attach to sciences such as physics. The statements themselves offer further assurance that whatever the outcome of the election we will have an administration in office that understands the indispensable contribution of the scientist to the well-being and growth of our society. Both candidates put themselves on record in favor of increased investments in basic research and a strong voice for science in the administration's decision making.

Unfortunately, nothing that approaches the positive attitude of the presidential candidates can be discerned in the collective mind of the Legislative Branch of Government. As we pointed out on this page in May, Congress's tendency to undervalue the contributions of science was clearly evident in the House's rejection this year of a proposed increase in NSF funds for basic research.

The task of educating the elected representatives of the public in Congress will require a continued dedicated effort on the part of a wide representation of scientists from all disciplines and geographical locations—an effort yet to be realized. However, we can point to some important first steps towards this goal.

First, in response to the severe budget cuts this year in nuclear physics and in the Large Space Telescope program (see editorial, page 96, April) individual physicists and astronomers most knowledgeable about these programs were able on short notice to educate Congressmen on the disastrous effects these cuts would have on the national research effort. We are pleased to observe that these stop-gap educational campaigns produced tangible results in that Congress has agreed to increase support for nuclear physics by \$7 million (compared to the previous cut of \$6 million) and has instructed NASA to request proposals for LST contracts.

We can view with equal satisfaction the success of a longer range effort—the AAAS Congressional Science Fellowship program—which is starting its fourth year of operation under the sponsorship of a number of scientific societies including The American Physical Society and the Optical Society of America. To date the program has sponsored a total of about 50 Fellows, including 9 Fellows sponsored by APS and one sponsored this year for the first time by OSA. Although the Fellowships are limited to a year, frequently at the end of their terms Fellows find positions in Washington or elsewhere at the science/society interface, so that the program is producing a cadre of Washington-oriented scientists that is steadily increasing in size.

Of course the most direct way for a scientist to help in the work of Congress is to be elected as a member of Congress itself. In the last election six candidates with science backgrounds ran for seats, three incumbents (Brown, Martin and McCormack) and three new candidates. The three incumbents and one new candidate, David Emery, were successful, so that this year four incumbents are running. And we report on page 63 that this year, in addition, we again have three new scientist candidates running for office. We hope there is a good chance that the number of scientists in the new Congress will increase further.

Clearly we are making some definite progress on the Hill in Washington. We now need to get many more physicists and other scientists involved to add to the momentum of these successes and reach the point where we are able to contribute on an on-going basis to the job of helping Congress cope with the highly scientific and technological aspects found in much of the legislation proposed for its consideration.

Harold L. Davis