

editorial

Physicists in Washington

It is quite appropriate that a special issue of PHYSICS TODAY be devoted to the subject of physicists in Washington. Physicists, both resident and visiting, play many roles in the nation's capital. They have a direct and indirect influence on its thought and activities. And it is an influence that extends from the White House—whose present occupant has more than a passing knowledge of physics—through the Congress and Federal agencies and beyond to all those institutions, industries and individuals whose activities and lives are affected by the edicts, incentives and attitudes generated in Washington.

As the articles in this issue indicate, physicists have a long history in Washington and the nature of their work here has changed over the years. In one respect, it has changed because of the expansion of the discipline itself, in another because physicists themselves have been extending their interests into many other fields. The Bromley Report of 1972—*"Physics in Perspective"*—illustrated the vast range of the physical sciences today and their interaction with national goals and the nation's economy. In the short time since that report, the widespread involvement of physical research with national issues has become more evident than ever.

Physics plays a dominant role in our energy research and development. Its research and applications influence our discovery and use of national resources. Its investigations and findings have an impact on our industrial productivity and the safety, efficiency and environmental aspects of industrial systems.

Physics is a major factor in the state of our national security. Its work related to the dynamics of the oceans and the atmosphere greatly determines our progress in climate and weather research, which in turn may influence our approaches to global food production. In addition, physics has had a tremendous impact on national health through its applications in biomedical technology. And perhaps most obvious has been the role of physics in creating the world of electronics responsible for the enormous leaps in industrial processes, transportation,

computer technology, communications, and the space activities that today promise so many earthly benefits as well as expanded knowledge of our universe.

All this is becoming well-recognized in Washington. And we look for that recognition to grow. Physicists, and those with training in physics who now work in or visit the nation's capital, can influence its decisions and help to assure that the contributions of research to the solution of national problems and to the human intellect are well understood.

Several years ago, the editor of this journal wrote that science had "lost its voice in Washington." I believe that voice has been regained. Now we must use it quietly and wisely to show the nation's capital and its people everywhere that science remains a good and positive force in our lives, and that scientific progress should be and can be synonymous with human progress here and around the world.

FRANK PRESS

Science and Technology Adviser to the President