

Science advice in the White House

Scientists felt reassured upon reading the campaign statement last Fall by President Reagan in *PHYSICS TODAY* (October, page 49) in which he foresaw an active and more public role for the President's Science Advisor. This feeling of confidence had been shaken by the rumors that the President might choose not to appoint a Science Advisor or may downgrade the position to an office outside the White House, perhaps in a government agency.

Now, more than ever, realistic American policy must depend on technological as well as social and political insights. Awareness of what is scientifically possible—and not possible—is as important in reaching major decisions as is the perception of economic and political opportunities. Over-optimistic estimates of the dependability of complex and costly weapons systems can lead to military hardware that threatens our security more than it supports it. Correct evaluation of this country's physical resources is necessary to put together a workable energy policy. An economic forecast beyond the next year or so must include the appraisal of new technological developments.

Such informed and realistic scientific judgment must be an ingredient, from the start, in the formulation of national strategy; it can not be injected later to hold together a plan flawed from the beginning by its absence.

As James Killian so aptly pointed out in his recent Op-Ed article in the *New York Times* (10 March), a Science Advisor is as necessary a part of the White House staff as political, security and publicity advisors.

In the past decade we have been showing signs of losing our preeminence in science and technology to other nations, some friendly, some not. We import automobiles and TV sets; computers will be next. We graduate scientific illiterates from our high schools. Our faltering in

the technological race poses a threat to our nation's future far more serious in the long run than our much-argued deficiencies in the arms race.

A Science Advisor close to the President's ear is essential if the Administration is to reverse this trend. I urge the President to announce his choice for this key post at an early date.

PHILIP M. MORSE

Chairman

*Committee on Public Policy
American Institute of Physics*