

CONGRESSMAN BROWN: NOT ONE TO 'BAD'-MOUTH SCIENCE

In his Reference Frame essay "Thoughts on Being Bad" (August, page 9), Daniel Kleppner discusses recent criticisms of science by John Lukacs, by Bryan Appleyard (in his notorious book *Understanding the Present*, which Kleppner accurately describes as "a useful manual for anyone on the antiscience warpath") and by Vaclav Havel, currently President of the Czech Republic. But then Kleppner refers, astonishingly in my view, to a recent essay¹ in the *American Journal of Physics* (of which I am the editor) by George E. Brown Jr, the chairman of the House Science, Space and Technology Committee, as if it too were a wholehearted attack on what we do. Indeed Congressman Brown was criticizing us for promising more than we can deliver. But whether or not Havel was "turning his back on science," Brown was not. And I cannot accept Kleppner's overall description of Brown's essay: "To summarize his message, Brown wants scientists to stop being bad."

It seems to me that Brown's real message for us was expressed in the final paragraph of his essay, a paragraph that I find inspiring:

Finally, we must recover a spirit which has, for many of us, been lost in the endless debates over funding and priorities and competition. The promise of societal benefit through technology development is often illusory, but the potential of science to empower the human intellect is not. My personal view—subjective in the extreme—is that the ultimate enrichment of the human spirit comes from our ability to expand our realm of experience and knowledge. Scientists must seek to share the privilege of their enrichment with others, not by promising more, faster, stronger machines, but by sharing what they know and how they feel. This demands a renewed commitment to education as the ultimate mechanism for individual empowerment,

and a critical prerequisite for social justice. This is a commitment that all scientists can make, in their own backyards, starting now.

Would that we had more members of Congress who understand our aspirations as well as does George Brown!

Reference

1. G. E. Brown Jr, *Am. J. Phys.* **60**, 779 (1992).

ROBERT H. ROMER
Amherst College

8/93

Amherst, Massachusetts

KLEPPNER REPLIES: The paragraph that Robert H. Romer cites constitutes a splendid encomium to science. And beyond writing such words, George Brown is actually fighting for science in Congress. At the moment he is defending research and attacking earmarking, for which he deserves our deep gratitude. Nevertheless, the very title of his essay, "The Objectivity Crisis," reveals that Brown has been attracted by the postmodern movement and its distorted view of science. The worldview from the postmodern bandwagon is gloomy, too gloomy to accommodate the optimism of science and, I suspect, the optimism of Congressman Brown.

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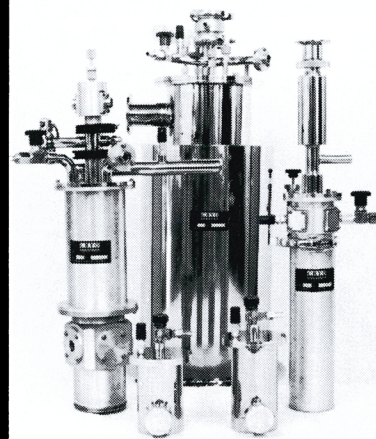
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