
An Open Letter to the President-Elect

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Dear Mr. President-Elect:

In January, when you take the Oath of Office, you will face difficult choices. As you well know, your decisions will have a profound impact on domestic and international affairs for years to come.

You'll be hearing many and often contradictory opinions on issues of science and technology. I urge you to listen carefully to advice from all quarters. The science agenda of the nation is too important to be neglected. Special attention to science and technology issues will bring great rewards for your administration and for our nation.

It's a long-standing tradition among editors to offer the newly elected president unsolicited advice. I will not break with that tradition, but will limit myself to arguing on behalf of only two items—a principle and a program—that deserve special consideration.

First, the principle. *Focus on the expertise rather than the political persuasion of the scientists you will name to run the federal agencies that deal with science and technology matters.* You and your opponent argued throughout the campaign about competence, and, considering the relative absence of scientists and scientifically trained

representatives in Congress, scientific competence (as well as the respect of the scientific community) are essential qualifications for the persons you name to strategic posts in the government. Your selections will be doubly important because our science strategy will increasingly affect the social and economic life of our nation in the 1990s and beyond. Thus, the people you select to implement that strategy must be informed and effective.

Second, the program. *Make education, in particular science and mathematics education, one of the first priorities of your administration.* Of course, there are pressing social and economic problems and important foreign relations issues to which you'll give the highest priority. That is as it should be. But do not forget to budget time and resources toward a vitally needed investment in our nation's future—the improvement of education for our children. The future will demand much from the next generation.

The problem is that the stream of scientifically literate citizens emerging from our high schools and even our universities is ebbing. It is clear that the nation's elementary and secondary schools have been per-

forming poorly, especially in the teaching of science and mathematics, as test scores and many studies have shown. Find out what makes certain schools successful and build on their successes. Invest in better teachers, improved facilities, and more stimulating curricula. And help make the career of scientist one that society recognizes as a high calling.

During your second and final debate, both you and your opponent mentioned scientists—Jonas Salk and Anthony Fauci—when asked to name current heroes among us. If you use the Office of the President to advance that message, perhaps more of our children will aspire to careers in science.

You and your opponent struggled over who would make the better “education president.” Now is the time to prove that those words car-

ried commitment. One method is by continuing to expand science education activities at the National Science Foundation.

The last administration neglected this important issue in its early years, virtually scrubbing the education budget of NSF. More recently, at the insistence of Congress, this budget has been sharply increased and NSF’s education programs expanded. In the appropriations process for the fiscal year 1989 budget, NSF’s Science and Engineering Directorate received a 22.8% increase over last year’s figure. That is a healthy development, one that your administration should nurture.

Early action on these two items will bring a favorable response from the scientific community—a community you will want to have on your side during the next four years. ■