

Political Scientists and  
Scientist-Politicians

October 9, 1974

Number 41

Sometimes I envy those of my academic colleagues who have the patience to devote long years developing theoretical models of information systems. But I have always had an irresistible itch not just to create ideas, but to carry them out. When I see a good idea that lies unused, I feel frustrated. You might call me an activist--or a John Dewey-style pragmatist.

On occasion, I have felt drawn toward political activity, but rarely enough to become effective. So I have gradually learned it is better to assist others who can devote their careers to political activism. I do this with an editorial, a financial contribution, an occasional speech or even a literature search. My activism is in information science and technology. But it is not without cognizance of the importance of political activism that I continue to cultivate my own garden.

All of us should remain sensitive to the urgency of political issues and the value of political activism--post-Watergate more than ever. Young scientists who are pondering their futures may want to consider the AAAS Congressional Fellow Program.<sup>1</sup> (This is not directly appli-

cable to our readers abroad, but comparable programs ought to exist in any country today—including the developing nations.)

My colleague Charles Tyroler II has provided me with some valuable insights which I think will interest readers.<sup>2</sup> The AAAS Congressional Fellow Program places young scientists and engineers with congressional staffs for a year or so. The theory is that it will be a two-way street. The young people will benefit by learning about day-to-day legislative politics, while the Congressmen and women and their staffs, benefit from the young scientist's expertise. But I suspect that the fellows will get much more than they give. Ideally, the 'embryo scientist' will come away with a working knowledge of how government operates and how the views of scientists can be transmitted and represented. At the same time our elected representatives get a meaningful glimpse of the scientific perspective.

Science and technology are certainly crucial considerations in many of the urgent political problems now awaiting decisions. As Scribner pointed out, the scientific and technical

resources available to Congressmen and Senators are considerably less than those available to the Executive branch. Perhaps the Congressional Fellow Program will add some weight to Congress's side of the scale. The new Office of Technology Assessment is also important in this respect.<sup>3</sup>

Similar fellowship programs have been sponsored by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, the American Physical Society, and the American Political Science Association. More such programs would be potentially productive.

When little science became Big Science, it became also a major political issue. Scientists had better accept that reality. Congressional fel-

lowship programs provide an ideal climate for serious and rewarding effort. Once scientists have accepted the *political* realities, they can help educate our elected representatives in the *scientific* realities. It has been said that the price of liberty is eternal vigilance. We must not allow the events surrounding Watergate to foster cynicism. During the recent year we have learned to respect the vast majority of representatives in Congress as dedicated political servants. Nevertheless, why scientists think and act the way they do may mystify politicians just as much as scientists may be puzzled by the rationales and actions of politicians.

1. Scribner, R.A. Scientist congressional fellows. *Science* 180:139, 1973.

2. Tyroler, C. II. Personal communication, 19 April 1973. (Mr. Tyroler is a member of ISI®'s Board of Directors.)

3. *Annual Report to the Congress by the Office of Technology Assessment, March 15, 1974.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974, 37 pp.