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Mr. Ford and Science Policy

With the sudden change in the Presidency, the spotlight has fallen on Mr. Ford. Can a politician whose base was a conservative Middle West constituency be responsive to a broader cross section? Can a friendly man whose rise to power came through political skills make the tough decisions required of a good administrator? One of the queries of special interest to the readers of *Science* is, "Will Mr. Ford find better ways of utilizing this nation's great scientific and technical potential in meeting national problems?" Only the passage of time will bring the answers to these questions, but indications are that Mr. Ford brings a different attitude toward science and technology than that of his two immediate predecessors.

Last January, Mr. Ford accepted an invitation to lunch with a group of presidents of scientific societies. Wonder of wonders in Washington, he appeared—and essentially on time. During the hour and a half of the occasion, Mr. Ford was attentive and responsive. He went as far as he could under the circumstances to indicate that the nation's science advisory apparatus should be improved. During the past 2 years, Mr. Ford has met with a number of other individuals and groups to consider science policy. These talks were off the record, and participants did not feel fully free to reveal to me details of the conversations. However, enough has been forthcoming to provide a basis for hope that the science advisory process will be improved.

In January 1972, Mr. Ford (then a congressman) responded to a letter from one of his constituents, Professor Vernon Ehlers of Calvin College. Ehlers had suggested that Mr. Ford meet with a local committee of scientists to discuss national issues involving science and technology. Mr. Ford subsequently met with the group on about six occasions. Ehlers reports that Mr. Ford was a good listener, open to suggestions, and quick to grasp significant arguments. When he disagreed with the proffered advice, he gave his reasons. Mr. Ford continued to meet with the group until becoming Vice President.

In the period since October 1973, Mr. Ford's contacts with science and technology have been broader in scope. On two occasions he met with James Killian, a former presidential adviser. At one of these meetings, Philip Handler, president of the National Academy of Sciences, was a participant. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the Academy's report on *Science and Technology in Presidential Policy-making*, which recommended a Council for Science and Technology. A copy of the document was sent ahead of the meeting, and in the discussion it was clear that Mr. Ford had read and understood the contents.

On another occasion, Mr. Ford met with Edward David, a former presidential science adviser. Details are not available, but again a major topic was a better advisory apparatus for science and technology. Some hint of the content of the talk may be obtained from David's recent congressional testimony, in which he suggested creation of an Office of Research and Engineering Management.

On still another occasion, Mr. Ford met with congressmen Rhodes, Mosher, and McCormack and Mr. Sawhill, head of the Federal Energy Administration, in a meeting arranged by Mosher (R-Ohio) to discuss a proposal advanced by McCormack (D-Wash.), who is the leading scientist in Congress. Again, McCormack's ideas differ from those advanced by Killian and David. My information is that McCormack advocates a cabinet post for science, technology, energy, and materials.

What will come of these various conversations is not clear, but at least it appears that Mr. Ford has been listening.—PHILIP H. ABELSON