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The Leadership of the Geological Survey

In its actions with respect to science, technology, and medicine, the Carter Administration has compiled a mixed record. During the transition period last December, actions of some of the Carter transition team were amateurish. At that time, a number of leading scientists received telephone calls asking them to identify possible advisers about science-related positions in the government. Some of the callers obviously knew little about the scientific community. When one of the team was told to consider the name of Jerome Wiesner, the caller asked "How do you spell it and where is he at?"

Within days of the Inauguration in January, there were peremptory firings of heads of agencies before replacements were in sight. In the filling of vacancies, the physical sciences did not fare very well. For example, Robert White, an excellent scientist and administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, who resigned of his own volition, has been replaced by a lawyer. The post of director of the National Bureau of Standards, long vacant, has still not been filled.

Lately, the performance of the Administration has improved markedly and excellent appointments have been announced. However, the recent dismissal of Vincent McKelvey, director of the U.S. Geological Survey, was disquieting for it seemed a step toward politicizing the Geological Survey.

During nearly 100 years the Survey has maintained a tradition of excellence recognized throughout the world. It is one of the few federal agencies whose activities represent an investment for the future. Throughout its history, the Survey has been directed by distinguished geologists. In turn, the heads of the operating divisions have been scientists broadly recognized for their competence. The Survey has been a research organization. It has been customary for professional staff to engage in fieldwork at some time during the year. Survey geologists have endured hardships in the process of studying the rocks on virtually every square mile of this country as well as on much of the rest of the earth. They have a degree of contact with the world outside Washington that is unusual in a federal agency.

A report on the Geological Survey prepared for Senator Jackson by Allen F. Agnew has provided a historical background and listed some of many major programs and goals.* In the report Dr. McKelvey summarized what he considered to be the mission of his organization. "The Survey's principal mission is to provide the knowledge about the earth that can serve as a basis for the identification and evaluation of resource and land use alternatives and for policy- and decision-making on the part of the Administration, the Congress, and the general public. Although the Survey's principal mission is to develop basic information on the earth and its resources, its responsibilities for the classification of Federal lands and the supervision of lease development are no less important. Essential in these missions is to insure that the nation's public resources are identified, conserved, and developed wisely, that the public receives its fair share value of leased resources, and that mineral exploration and production do minimum damage to other resource or environmental values. The Survey uses its scientific and technical resources to help achieve these objectives."

The Geological Survey has traditions of rigor and excellence and an uncommon respect for facts and truth. The nation would lose a great institution if an inappropriate choice of the new director were made. A committee of the National Academy of Sciences has nominated a panel of first-class scientists who are qualified to serve. If the name of one of these is submitted to the Senate, damage will be limited. Joan Davenport, Assistant Secretary for Energy and Minerals at the Department of the Interior has stated that a distinguished scientist will be chosen. Her commitment to foster this action is reassuring.—PHILIP H. ABELSON

*A. F. Agnew, *The U.S. Geological Survey* (Committee Print, Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, 94th Congress, 1st Session, December 1975).