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President Reagan, Science, and Engineering

In his first 4 months in office President Reagan has demonstrated considerable political acumen. He has focused major public attention on budget cutting, an issue he could win on. The recent victory in the House of Representatives' vote on budget cuts makes it seem likely that the White House will be a dominant factor in budget decisions for years to come. Other victories are likely to follow. Twenty-five years of Democratic Congresses have left some easy targets in such areas as federal paperwork, federal regulations, and excessive taxation. Mr. Reagan's actions to date indicate that he intends to move energetically toward goals he enunciated during his campaign. It is quite possible that he will continue to perform in a way that most presidents before him have avoided. Ordinarily, promises made during a campaign are quickly forgotten, but Mr. Reagan may turn out to be one of the exceptional presidents who reaches many of his announced goals. But sooner or later, the President is likely to run out of easy triumphs; for example, his proposed cure for the nation's economic problems is questionable. In view of the record to date, it seems worthwhile to examine the President's positions with respect to science and engineering.

For the longer term, if this nation is to enjoy security and to compete economically, it must foster a strong scientific and engineering competence. Of this the Reagan camp seems unaware. The 32,000-word 1980 Republican platform made no mention of medical research. One tiny paragraph (about 40 words) was devoted to research on renewable energy. Another paragraph (about 50 words) contained the following: "America's technological advantage has always depended upon its interaction with our civilian science and technology sector." A search of the *New York Times* index for pre- or postelection treatment of science or technology by Mr. Reagan drew a blank. During the campaign, substantial efforts were made by publications to elicit information concerning attitudes toward science and engineering. Comments published in the 27 October 1980 issue of *Chemical and Engineering News* were brief and not particularly responsive. The material submitted by the Reagan camp for publication in the October issue of the engineering journal *Spectrum* was an insult to the profession. Some questions were unanswered. Responses were uninformative.

Our search for documentary information included the Republican National Committee and the White House Press Information Office. Neither had anything positive to contribute. A call to Representative Don Fuqua (D-Fla.), chairman of the House Committee on Science and Technology, provided no insight about Reagan. A call to the office of Senator Harrison Schmitt (R-N.M.) also yielded no further information about Reagan. However, Schmitt, the former astronaut who holds a Ph.D. degree in geology and is chairman of the Science, Technology, and Space Subcommittee of the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee, sent us a copy of a letter he had written to Budget Director David Stockman in which he staunchly defended scientific research. Other congressmen who have been supportive are James G. Martin (R-N.C.), who holds a Ph.D. degree in chemistry, and Don Ritter (R-Pa.), who has a Ph.D. in metallurgy.

Others in influential positions whose opinions have not yet been openly manifested are industrial scientists and engineers. Today some of these people are found among top management in many of the most successful companies. They are aware of the nation's needs for higher education, especially that in the sciences. A very distinguished group of them has formulated a constructive program for meeting the nation's scientific and technological needs. The document was submitted to the White House early this year. The authors have received assurances that their report was favorably received, but as yet it has not been publicly released.

The Reagan camp has so far chosen to ignore the scientific and engineering community. For the short run, it may be able to afford to do so. But for the long term, it can ill afford to lose support among those who advance this nation's technological strength.—PHILIP H. ABELSON