

**American Association for the Advancement of Science**  
*Science* serves its readers as a forum for the presentation and discussion of important issues related to the advancement of science, including the presentation of minority or conflicting points of view, rather than by publishing only material on which a consensus has been reached. Accordingly, all articles published in *Science*—including editorials, news and comment, and book reviews—are signed and reflect the individual views of the authors and not official points of view adopted by the AAAS or the institutions with which the authors are affiliated.

**Publisher:** Alvin W. Trivelpiece

**Editor:** Daniel E. Koshland, Jr.

**Deputy Editors:** Philip H. Abelson (*Engineering and Applied Sciences*); John I. Brauman (*Physical Sciences*)

## EDITORIAL STAFF

**Managing Editor:** Patricia A. Morgan

**Assistant Managing Editor:** Nancy J. Hartnagel

**Senior Editors:** Eleanor Butz, Ruth Kulstad

**Associate Editors:** Martha Coleman, R. Brooks Hanson, Barbara Jasny, Katrina L. Kelnner, Edith Meyers, Linda J. Miller, Phillip D. Szuroni, David F. Voss

**Letters Editor:** Christine Gilbert

**Book Reviews:** Katherine Livingston, *editor*; Deborah Field Washburn

**This Week in Science:** Ruth Levy Guyer

**Contributing Editor:** Lawrence I. Grossman

**Chief Production Editor:** Ellen E. Murphy

**Editing Department:** Lois Schmitt, *head*; Mary McDaniel, Patricia L. Moe, Barbara E. Patterson

**Copy Desk:** Jol S. Granger, Beverly Shields, Anna Victoreen, Barbara Wittig

**Production Manager:** Karen Schools Colson

**Assistant Production Manager:** James Landry

**Graphics and Production:** Holly Bishop, James J. Olivari, Yolanda M. Rook

**Covers Editor:** Grayce Finger

**Manuscript Systems Analyst:** William Carter

## NEWS STAFF

**News Editor:** Barbara J. Culliton

**Deputy News Editors:** Roger Lewin, Colin Norman

**News and Comment/Research News:** Deborah M. Barnes, William Booth, Gregory Byrne, Mark H. Crawford, Constance Holden, Richard A. Kerr, Eliot Marshall, Jean L. Marx, Robert Pool, Leslie Roberts, Marjorie Sun, M. Mitchell Waldrop, John Walsh

**European Correspondent:** David Dickson

## BUSINESS STAFF

**Business Staff Manager:** Deborah Rivera-Wienhold

**Classified Advertising Supervisor:** Karen Morgenstern

**Membership Recruitment:** Gwendolyn Huddle

**Member and Subscription Records:** Ann Ragland

**Guide to Biotechnology Products and Instruments:**

Shauna S. Roberts

## ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVES

**Director:** Earl J. Scherago

**Traffic Manager:** Donna Rivera

**Traffic Manager (Recruitment):** Gwen Canter

**Advertising Sales Manager:** Richard L. Charles

**Employment Sales Manager:** Edward C. Keller

**Marketing Manager:** Herbert L. Burkland

**Sales:** New York, NY 10036: J. Kevin Henebry, 1515 Broadway (212-730-1050); Scotch Plains, NJ 07076: C. Richard Callis, 12 Unami Lane (201-889-4873); Chicago, IL 60194: Jack Ryan, 525 W. Higgins Rd. (312-885-8675); San Jose, CA 95112: Bob Brindley, 310 S. 16 St. (408-998-4690); Dorset, VT 05251: Fred W. Dieffenbach, Kent Hill Rd. (802-867-5581); Damascus, MD 20872: Rick Sommer, 24808 Shrubbery Hill Ct. (301-972-9270); U.K., Europe: Nick Jones, +44(0647)52918; Telex 42513; FAX (0647) 52053.

**Information for contributors** appears on page XI of the 30 September 1988 issue. Editorial correspondence, including requests for permission to reprint and reprint orders, should be sent to 1333 H Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005. Telephone: 202-326-6500.

Advertising correspondence should be sent to Tenth Floor, 1515 Broadway, New York, NY 10036. Telephone 212-730-1050 or WU Telex 968082 SCHERAGO, or FAX 212-382-3725.

## Presidential Elections and the NSF Directorship

The separation of science from politics is a principle whose importance to the nation is worthy of frequent affirmation. However, the scientific community must also recognize that science exists in a political environment. The scientific leadership in the 1940s understood the distinction between engaging in partisan politics and understanding the political process. Otherwise it could not have succeeded in the political negotiations that led to the creation of the National Science Foundation (NSF) in 1950. One purpose of those negotiations was to use the political process itself to shield NSF from party politics by giving it characteristics novel for a government agency. Designation of the agency as a "foundation" was one such characteristic. Equally important was the establishment of a 6-year term for the NSF director, a very unusual arrangement in a federal agency.

Prior to World War II, most support for basic research came either from a university's own funds or from one of the private philanthropic foundations. In 1945, when Vannevar Bush and his colleagues sought to legitimize federal support for scientific research in nongovernment institutions, they conceived the idea of a publicly supported foundation governed by a distinguished, part-time, presidentially appointed board of directors; namely, the National Science Board.\* By designating the proposed agency as a foundation, they meant to convey a clear signal that government support for science had to be free from partisan politics.

President Truman demonstrated his understanding and respect for the intent inherent in the word "foundation" by establishing an important precedent: the NSF director should be selected on the basis of scientific credentials and administrative ability rather than on grounds of ideological purity or for payment of a political debt. That precedent was consistent with the intent of a Congress in mandating a 6-year term for the NSF director to decouple that appointment from the 4-year presidential election cycle.

Truman's precedent turned out to be good politics as well as wise policy. In 1969 President Nixon reversed his announced intention to nominate Franklin Long as the third NSF director because of Long's opposition to the deployment of an antiballistic missile system. Both the scientific community and Congress vigorously protested what they regarded as a blatant attempt to politicize the NSF. With that single exception, all of Truman's successors in the Oval Office have followed his precedent with respect to the appointment of the NSF director. Nor has any newly inaugurated president ever asked the NSF director to resign.

But NSF is a government agency, despite its uniqueness. And the presidentially appointed head of any government agency has to understand and work within a political environment if that agency is to succeed in the battle for scarce resources. In that respect, the task of the NSF director is particularly sensitive. The scientific community quite properly regards him as a principal spokesman within government for the national research system. Therefore, he is often obliged to walk a tightrope between effective science advocacy and partisan politics. Erich Bloch, the present NSF director, has displayed his understanding of the changing political environment in which NSF functions, as well as a considerable talent for walking that tightrope. He has been willing to take controversial positions and make provocative statements in emphasizing the importance of a vigorous scientific system. Some of his decisions have distressed and even angered members of the scientific community, but those are the occupational hazards of operating in a political environment.

The nonpartisan character of NSF deserves the continued support of both political parties. As the external environment for science becomes increasingly complex, Truman's wise precedent with respect to the NSF directorship should be taken to heart by the new administration. After the election, the president-elect should quickly establish the fact that he expects Director Bloch to complete the remaining 2 years of his 6-year term. This action by the president-elect would send a strong signal to the scientific community that he understands the historical reasons for a 6-year term and the need to maintain a separation between science and politics.—RICHARD C. ATKINSON, *Chancellor, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA 92093*

\*V. Bush, *Science: The Endless Frontier* (National Science Foundation, Washington, DC, 1980), pp. 31–40.