A Comprehensive U.S. Energy Policy

IN HIS EDITORIAL "MEETING THE ENERGY challenge," John P. Holdren forcefully made the case for "...increased efforts to maximize the capabilities and minimize the liabilities of the full array of energy options...." (*Science*'s Compass, 9 Feb., p. 945). But Holdren did not recommend on whom or on which institution these responsibilities should be placed. Energy is the ultimate resource of humankind, as the supply of all other necessities of life, such as potable water and clean air, can be enhanced with the availability of energy. Moreover, access to energy determines, to a considerable extent, the distribution of political power; the accident of nature that located vast petroleum reserves in dictator-led and warlike nations plays a large role in international affairs, as well as in the disposition and size of military forces.

If somewhere within the executive and legislative branches of the U.S. federal government there exists a comprehensive energy policy—one that encompasses economics, ecology, international relations, and the military—I have never found it. Holdren's editorial should be perceived as a plea for just such a policy for the United States.

MONROE BURK
5449 New Grange Garth, Columbia, MD 21045, USA

HOLDREN WISELY AVOIDS GETTING INTO THE morass of cultural factors that affect the usage and management of the U.S. energy supply. However, the effect of one such factor is so profound that it cannot be ignored: states' rights in regulating electricity supply and prices. It made sense to leave such regulation to the states when electricity was generated and mainly used locally. Now, however, electricity is bought from generators half the nation away from the points of end use, and transported through a nationally connected electric power grid. In these circumstances, the action of any state can profoundly affect the electricity supply and prices in a large fraction of the nation (*1*).

We have seen this effect in the recent California debacle, where the governors of several other western states expressed concern about California's impact on their own state's electricity supplies and prices. Surely, this aspect of energy supply should qualify for federal action under the interstate commerce clause of the U.S. Constitution (*2*), to ensure efficient and equitable distribution of electricity from a secure, nationally guided electric power generation and distribution system, much as we manage the interstate transportation systems. Yet this need has nowhere been mentioned in any public discussions of the California electric power crisis and its aftermath.

> **"This seems to be a clear case of our ideology getting in the way of our common sense, to the detriment of our national welfare."**

This seems to be a clear case of our ideology getting in the way of our common sense, to the detriment of our national welfare.

S. J. DEITCHMAN
3606 Stewart Drive, Chevy Chase, MD 20815, USA. E-mail: sdeitch@concentric.net

References and Notes
1. T. J. Overbye, *Am. Sci.* **88**, 220 (2000).
2. *The Constitution of the United States*, Article 1, Section 8.

Portugal: A Case History in S&T Cooperation

IN 1989, FORMAL UNITED STATES–PORTUGAL cooperation in science and technology (S&T) was almost nonexistent. Within Europe, only the former German Democratic Republic had less scientific contact with U.S. S&T agencies. A dozen years later, it would seem that not much has changed. A recent search of the U.S. Department of State's long list of bilateral science agreements finds just one agreement between Portugal and the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (*1*).

A handful of staffers at the U.S. Department of State and some of the U.S. science agencies saw this imbalance in 1989 and tried to change it by drafting proposals for an "umbrella" S&T agreement with potential funding from the Lisbon-based Luso-American Development Foundation (*1*). The idea made it as far as the briefing books for the 11 January 1990 meeting between then-President George Bush and Prime Minister Anibal Cavaco Silva. But no farther.

Perhaps it is time to try again. Portugal has applied European Union funds and internal reforms to build a well-equipped, Internet-connected S&T base. Richard Stone's News Focus article ("Portugal: Money and charisma help the science tide come in," 9 Mar., p. 1889) pointed out a number of potential areas for bilateral cooperation. Others areas include genetics, cancer, archaeology, geology, tropical medicine, and HIV-2 research in Lusophone Africa. There were good reasons for

> **"A recent search...of bilateral science agreements finds just one...between Portugal and the [United States]"**

Letters to the Editor

Letters (~300 words) discuss material published in *Science* in the previous 6 months or issues of general interest. They can be submitted by e-mail (science_letters@aaas.org), the Web (www.letter2science.org), or regular mail (1200 New York Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20005, USA). Letters are not acknowledged upon receipt, nor are authors generally consulted before publication. Whether published in full or in part, letters are subject to editing for clarity and space.