academic ecologists are quite willing to help, fewer have the requisite information, and fewer still the time to fulfill satisfying roles as advisors. Because of the structure of the universities themselves, science professors do not become involved in the affairs of government at a level other than that of the occasional testimony at a hearing. Universities were intended for teaching and research, and the reward structure is so oriented. A professor who is asked to supply a detailed memo on a topic of immediate concern to a congressional committee cannot drop other responsibilities for 2 weeks while he completes the task. Not, that is, unless universities provide some mechanism and incentive to make such involvement possible. Allowing interested professors a term off, at full pay, independent of sabbatical leave, to research some issue of concern to Congress, is one possibility. Encouraging a professor to spend sabbatical leave in Washington, and giving credit to such experience when promotions are made, is another. Acknowledging the merit of research of an immediate and applied nature, is a third. These are certainly departures from traditional academic roles. Those university administrators who proclaim a desire for university involvement in community affairs need to determine whether the priorities and rewards characteristic of their own institutions are at all conducive to such activity.

In addition to a lack of professors' time, there is currently a deficiency of requisite environmental information. This phenomenon may stem from the stigma still attached to applied research in some circles of academic ecologists, as well as to the difficulty of doing such research without the sponsorship of a government agency or company with a bias about the desired results. The new Institute of Ecology, the RANN (Research Applied to National Needs) program of the National Science Foundation, and the National Environmental Center bill (S.1113) which has passed the Senate, may help the latter situation.

Clearly, there is much more that politicians could do to encourage the involvement of academic scientists—publish in *Science* or elsewhere an account of current problems that need to be solved; embrace facts offered in their full complexity, without simplifying problems to the extent that scientists are turned off; support the appropriation of funds for long-term basic research and immediate problem-solving research.

At the same time, immediate steps can be taken within the universities to bring the expressed concern for involvement in environmental problems, and incentives for such involvement, into closer consonance.

WALTER E. WESTMAN
2659 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20008

Technology Assessment

The report on the Office of Technology Assessment (News and Comment, 3 Mar., p. 970) contains an unfortunate non sequitur which might lead some readers to infer that Raymond Bowers and I feel that our technology assessment of microwave devices (*1*) was a complete assessment —even though we did not consider the social impact of the use of these devices.

The original title of our paper, when it was given at last summer's Cornell Conference on High Frequency Generation and Amplification, was "A preliminary technology assessment of solid state microwave devices." Within the *Scientific American* article itself, we admitted that, "Our attempt cannot be comprehensive. . . . We hope these first steps will lead to an analysis of broader social implications."

We agree entirely with the Congress that technology assessment must include the "physical, economic, social, and political" effects of a technology.

JEFFREY FREY
School of Electrical Engineering, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York 14850

Reference

1. R. Bowers and J. Frey, *Sci. Amer.* **226**, 13 (Feb. 1972).

PCB's in the Environment

It is simple to assert that an event, having once occurred in a laboratory, "may" take place again. Thus it took no great foresight for Mosser *et al.* (14 Jan., p. 191), in their study of the effects of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB's), to conclude:

> Selective inhibition of sensitive phytoplankton species by PCB's, DDT, and other stable pollutants in the environment may alter the species composition of natural algal communities. . . . Such effects at the base of aquatic or estuarine food webs could profoundly affect higher organisms as well.