

Science and Public Problems

There has been an increasing interest in the application of science and technology to public problems (see, for example, the President's Message to Congress, 16 March 1972). Under a grant from the Office of Intergovernmental Science Programs of the National Science Foundation to Speaker Perry B. Duryea, Jr., the Assembly Scientific Staff of the New York State Legislature ran a single ad in the Sunday *New York Times*, and a single classified ad in *Science* (11 Feb. 1972, p. 677) for a Principal Scientific Adviser. In addition, 175 letters were sent to government agencies and universities announcing the position.

As of the cutoff date (1 March 1972), 355 replies had been received, half from the ad in *Science*, 16 from women, and 6 from foreign countries. Exactly

300 respondents had doctoral degrees, and the average age of the respondents was 42. Fields of interest were about equally divided between the biological and physical sciences. Clearly, 79 people were unemployed, and 36 were ambiguous. All were told, unfortunately only by means of a form letter, of the substantial response, but 128 wrote twice or more.

The Assembly Scientific Staff was established in February 1971 by Speaker Duryea to bring scientific and technological expertise to the legislative process. It is the first day-to-day legislative scientific advisory group. When we anticipate and respond to requests, in addition to our own resources we call upon experts in universities, professional societies, industries, and government, and summarize the problem in straightforward English.

A crucial point in the application of

science is that legislators, being politically accountable, must be able to demonstrate favorable results to their constituents every year in the same way that a businessman, being financially accountable, must show a profit every year. Scientists who wish to participate in the solution of public problems (and from the data above, there seem to be many) must learn to function in this climate of the real world and merchandise their product of problem-solving with attention to a market that often doesn't understand what science really can do. In this matter, professional societies such as the American Association for the Advancement of Science could accept a real challenge.

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*Assembly Scientific Staff,
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