

LETTERS

Science Advice

The thoughtful editorial by William T. Golden (10 Oct., p. 145) calling for the reestablishment of the President's Science Advisory Committee (PSAC) is timely and reflects the views of many who are concerned about science and technology policy advice at the highest level of our government.

I would add to Golden's observations that the statutory foundation for the reestablishment of PSAC already exists. The Science Policy Act of 1976 (Public Law 94-282, Title III) established the President's Committee on Science and Technology (PCST). In fact, this committee was appointed in October 1976 under the able leadership of Simon Ramo, chairman, and William Baker, vice chairman. However, much to the regret of myself and many of my colleagues in the Congress, President Carter elected in March 1977, at the recommendation of his science adviser, not to appoint a new committee when the previous committee submitted their pro forma resignations.

The Science Policy Act provides that the PCST conduct a comprehensive, 2-year Survey of Federal Science, Engineering, and Technology. This work was begun by the Ramo-Baker PCST but has never been completed. At the conclusion of this 2-year survey, the President is provided under the Act with the option to extend the life of the committee.

Golden's main point, that the "reestablishment of the PSAC would benefit the nation, strengthen the presidency, gratify Congress, and encourage the scientific and technological communities" is one to which I wholeheartedly subscribe. I urge President-elect Reagan and his science adviser to give this matter their urgent and early consideration.

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Golden's editorial plea to reestablish the PSAC strikes at two key issues: the importance of and the performance of technology advisory apparatus for the President. Golden discusses the past institution but does not examine the recent performance of the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP).

The referenced 1976 legislation, PL 94-282, set forth a powerful framework for national science and technology policy. It did not, however, simply recreate the earlier presidential science advisory

mechanism. There is new focus on (i) policy; (ii) technology rather than science, research, and development; (iii) the role of technology as a social process embodying economic, legal, and political, as well as technical, components; and (iv) future-oriented analysis.

Three public studies have evaluated how well the current legislation and advisory machinery have worked (1). They give the present OSTP something less than high marks. None proposed to reestablish PSAC. These critiques admit problems in assessing OSTP performance. First, evaluation is difficult where a major component involves a confidential relationship with the President. But Congress expected much more. Second, many of the OSTP's mandated functions were altered by a reorganization procedure to which the Congress agreed. The critically important Annual Report and Five-Year Outlook were assigned to the National Science Foundation. The Federal Coordinating Council was asked to serve the OSTP director instead of the President. The President's Committee on Science and Technology, very much akin to PSAC, was abandoned.

As a consequence, OSTP has not provided outside the White House the expected navigational aids and storm warnings, has not helped balance tendencies of the system to focus on the short run at the expense of the long, and has not provided adequate integration of separate policies and of sectoral programs narrowly advanced by separate bureaucratic engines or special interest lobbies. This may be the price of democracy, but presidential leadership is essential to gain both internal coherence and external consensus.

It would thus seem that fulfilling the legislative mandate requires reform within the OSTP itself, not just restarting the PSAC. Should Title III of PL 94-282 be renewed and a PSAC created, it is hoped that membership would go beyond the editorial's advocacy of representation from the physical, biological, medical, and social sciences. In dealing with technology as well as science, one would at the very least expect participation by engineers.

Before reactivating Title III, the President and the Congress may want to look carefully at the statutory Technology Assessment Advisory Council created by PL 92-484, with a role analogous to PSAC, to ascertain how well it worked during the 7-year PSAC hiatus.

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References

1. Congressional Research Service, *Implementation of the National Science and Technology Policy, Organization, and Priorities Act of 1976 (PL 94-282): A Two-Year Status Report* (Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1978); *Implementation of the National Science and Technology Policy, Organization, and Priorities Act of 1976 (PL 94-282): Progress and Prospects* (American Society for Public Administration, Washington, D.C., 1979); Comptroller General of the United States, *The Office of Science and Technology Policy: Adaptation to a President's Operating Style May Conflict with Congressionally Mandated Assignments* (Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1980).

IDEA

I would like to elucidate some aspects and figures that were mentioned in William J. Broad's article "Third World science vies for petro dollars" (News and Comment, 10 Oct., p. 169).

The new International Foundation for Advanced Studies (IDEA, if one uses the Spanish acronym) was legally constituted in July 1980. Venezuelan President Luis Herrera Campins was its principal promoter. The founding members were the Republic of Venezuela, Petróleos de Venezuela, C.A., Simón Bolívar University, Andrés Bello University, and Fundaciencia.

The funding, 200 million *bolívares*, will come from the above-mentioned members; of this total, the government of Venezuela has already asked its Congress to approve the first 50 million *bolívares* (1 *bolívar* equals 23 cents).

IDEA will develop a program of research and teaching at the highest level in various scientific fields. Emphasis will be placed on programs in biology, neurosciences, and social studies; individuals and institutions—both Venezuelan and international—will be able to participate.

Furthermore, IDEA will develop a program of scientific and technological cooperation among Third World countries (INTERMUNDO). This was the program which Venezuela proposed to the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) nations under the name "Instituto de Estudios Avanzados del Tercer Mundo" (Institute of Advanced Studies for the Third World). The government of Venezuela is presently negotiating these matters with Unesco and OPEC; the collaboration of international organizations is expected as well.

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Erratum: Leo Kadanoff, a 1980 winner of the Wolf prize in physics (News and Comment, 17 Oct., p. 294), is on the faculty of the University of Chicago, not Brown University.