
Scientists Must Learn to Lobby

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Mention lobbying to a scientist and until quite recently the typical response was disinterest or discomfort. Active involvement in the political fray over the public funding of research has simply not been within the experience of most scientists. Moreover, the pejorative connotations evoked by terms like "lobby" and "political action committee" only reinforce an innate distaste many hold for overt forms of influencing decision-makers in government. That distaste has been enormously strengthened lately as some U.S. universities have, through direct lobbying that bypasses the merit review process, successfully appealed to Congress for facilities funding.

Historically, scientists have been more comfortable with indirect—or so-called non-lobbying—lobbying efforts, such as those of the academies and national associations. But that is changing, here and abroad.

"The dependence of scientific research on the large sums that have to be voted on by popularly elected governments and legislative bodies has focused the minds of scientists on the public arena to an extent that is unprecedented," Edward Shils, professor of sociology at the Univer-

sity of Chicago, observed recently. "The freedom they enjoyed when research projects were small and demands for practical results were less insistent is no longer the natural and inevitable condition of scientific research. The outer world has forced itself into the horizon of scientists as never before." ("Science and Scientists in the Public Arena," *American Scholar*, Spring 1987, p. 195) Indeed, necessity has converted many of us to political involvement. Here are a few examples from around the world:

■ Last year, the cuts French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac inflicted on science prompted over 280 research directors to place advertisements in *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* condemning the government's actions and appealing for support of increased funding. Signing the advertisement were some of the most prominent scientists from the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique and the Institut National de la Santé et de la Recherche Médicale.

■ In January 1986 a similar advertisement, criticizing government underfunding of U.K. science, appeared in *The Times of London*. More than 2,500 researchers responded and out of that response

grew Save British Science (SBS), headed by Professor Denis Noble of Oxford. Supported largely by individual scientists, the SBS "communicate[s] to the public, parliament and the government a proper appreciation of the economic and cultural benefits of scientists' research," according to its literature. Its London office directs letter-writing campaigns by scientists to members of Parliament. Also actively lobbying for science in Britain is a predecessor of SBS, the Alliance for Science, representing the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs, university teachers and professional civil servants. It is also noteworthy that Sir George Porter has played a more direct political role in public-funding issues than any previous president of the Royal Society.

■ In 1984 the Australian government handed down a budget containing such shocking cuts in support for individual research projects that the Australian Academy of Sciences (AAS) organized the National Committee for the Promotion of Science and Technology. The Committee met in April of the next year and established the Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies, consisting of 67 societies and representing over 60,000 members. The Federation aims to lobby the government actively for support of scientific research and to serve as a national resource center on scientific and technological information for the media and secondary schools, as well as for politicians. The

Federation's lobbying, along with similar efforts by the AAS, the Institute of Engineers and the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering, was in large measure responsible for real increases in R&D funding in the 1986 budget.

■ In the United States, aside from the Ad Hoc Group for Medical Research Funding (which represents health and biomedical interests) and various university associations, there is the small but growing National Coalition for Science and Technology (NCST), which opened shop in 1983 in Washington, D.C. The NCST, to which my firm belongs, is a registered lobby representing individual scientists, universities, businesses and associations. It promotes governmental support for science and has recently concentrated its efforts on funding for the National Science Foundation and NASA. The NCST has recently floated the idea of establishing a science trust fund in support of facilities, equipment, education and multiyear research projects.

In February of this year, a new U.S. lobbying group, the Council on Research and Technology (CORETECH), was formed. CORETECH, a cooperative of businesses, universities and industrial organizations, has so far focused its efforts on maintaining and extending R&D tax credits, but intends to address the issues of facilities and equipment funding, overhead, education and university-industry cooperation.

Such examples of overt political

action by scientists and their representatives would have been unheard of only a decade ago. But the crises in funding for scientific research around the globe, as well as the qualitative change big science ushered in, has stirred many a scientist from political somnolence.

The scientific community has a long-standing commitment to political activism concerning matters of conscience (I am thinking of the Federation of American Scientists and the Union of Concerned Scientists, among others), but this new attention to the politics of the science funding is, in my view, welcome and overdue. And this is not my view alone. Readers of *The Scientist* have seen Frank Press, president of the National Academy of Sciences, Alvin Trivelpiece, president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, former U.S. Representative Don Fuqua, current U.S. Representative George E. Brown (D-Calif.), and Sir George Porter endorse political action by scientists (in the October 20, 1986, April 20, 1987, November 17, 1986, February 9, 1987 and January 12, 1987 issues, respectively). Who better than they know the workings of government and what must be done to help science?

There are at least three major reasons why science lobbying is essential. In the short term, it increases the likelihood that funding for basic and applied research for the next fiscal year is available for worthy science projects, which otherwise might be eclipsed by the

demands of other special interest groups who have the advantage of years of experience in gaining the attention of the decision-makers in government. It's a matter of coping with reality. Second, and in the long term, lobbying goes far beyond buttonholing representatives in the corridors of power. When done correctly, lobbying is an educational effort—one directed not only at elected officials but also at the public, whose support is vital to science.

Finally, public expenditure on science is tantamount to defining science policy. By lobbying, whether through letter-writing or through membership in an association that lobbies, scientists take an active role in helping to shape that policy rather than merely reacting to what is presented by government officials. A case in point is the science policy of the Reagan administration. By its advancement of flashy big-ticket items, such as SDI research, the Shuttle, the Superconducting Supercollider, and NSF's Centers program (some or all of which may be worthy of support), the Reagan administration has taken the lead in shaping science policy now and in the coming years. If, as the continuing federal deficit would seem to require, funding for these programs cuts into funding for individual investigators and little science projects, many scientists will wish they had been more vocal in their preferences for public funding of science.

There is a science to politics and, for the sake of science, scientists must learn to lobby. ■