Foreword

Although the importance of scientific information to national decision making continues to increase, recent administrations have failed to reestablish anything resembling the strong, independent expert group—the President’s Science Advisory Committee—that once provided the executive branch with scientific counsel. In this edition of *Cardinal Choices*, Gregg Herken has brought the story up to date, explaining that the experiences of President Clinton’s science adviser, Jack Gibbons, former director of the Office of Technology Assessment, were similar to those of D. Allen Bromley, Assistant to the President for Science and Technology under President Bush. While both appointments reflected an awareness of the increasing national concern with issues such as the environment, science education, and technological competition, both also involved a quite limited conception of the appropriate role for scientific advice. Overall, Herken believes that recent presidents are falling short when it comes to what is needed to deal with the critical questions facing us today.

The relationship between American presidents and science always has had a surprisingly idiosyncratic flavor. Chief executives from Franklin Roosevelt to Ronald Reagan have adopted very different approaches to dealing with the scientific community. Herken, who is Historian and Curator, Space History Department, of the National Air and Space Museum at the Smithsonian Institution, traces the history of presidential science advising—in its way an astonishing story. One might have predicted, I think, that the advance of scientific knowledge and the extension of its implications for other areas of government would ensure an ever-expanding role for science advising in the executive branch. Instead, the history of science advising has been uneven. There have been times when there was systematic provision of high-level analysis, times when government relied on fragmented, competing advice from the scientific establishment, and times when well-placed individuals had direct access to and influence on the president.

Regrettably, the issues that drive the presidential agenda all too often have little to do with the long-term forces, such as science, that shape the nation's future. Certainly, the effects of scientific developments should be high on any list of national concerns. Indeed, as economic competitiveness has emerged as a powerful political issue, one might expect the connection between scientific progress and economic growth to force a reappraisal of federal organization in this area. Since economists are securely linked—for example, through the Council of Economic Advisors—to the highest level of executive decision making, why aren't scientists?

Herken's comprehensive history of the tensions between the cultures of science and government draws upon declassified documents and interviews with the principals, providing a useful guide to the difficulties in the relationship. We remain grateful to him for his continuing contribution to the historical literature and to our understanding of science, government, and policy making.

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