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LETTERS

edited by Etta Kavanagh

Reminding Scientists of Their Civic Duties

THE VERY WISE FORMER CONGRESSMAN SHERWOOD BOEHLERT OF THE HOUSE SCIENCE Committee said, "If scientists are going to be more effective participants in the policy arena, they have to ... learn more about the policy work" ("S&T Forum: States, industry play key role in U.S. innovation drive," AAAS News and Notes, 25 May, p. 1140). For over 40 years, I have been urging the scientific societies (like AAAS, American Chemical Society, American Physical Society, and Materials Research Society, to which I belong) to stop merely, again and again, berating the public's "scientific illiteracy" and turn all that energy to fixing the unbelievable policy illiteracy of scientists. For years I have tested this, in talks at largish audiences in society meetings. Over 90% typically admitted to not being able to name their two senators and congressperson. Very, very few recognized what the "House Science Committee" was or did.

"Physician (or physicist, chemist, biologist), heal thyself!" A regular clever quarter-page lesson on contemporary "civics" in *Science* might be a start and a recurring reminder of scientists' responsibilities as citizens.

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