



## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR AMERICA'S PROGRESS

### Ensuring the Best Presidential Appointments in the New Administration (2008)

The security, economic well-being, and safety and health of the United States depend on the strength and vitality of the nation's science and technology (S&T) enterprise. Almost every aspect of modern public policy is touched by S&T, including national security, economic development, health care, the environment, education, energy, and natural resources. The US research enterprise is the largest in the world and leads in innovation in many fields. For these reasons, it is critical to attract scientists and engineers into the highest levels of public service, either as political appointees in top leadership positions or as members of the many advisory committees providing scientific and technical advice to executive agencies.

This is the fourth in a series of reports issued by the National Academies on the presidential appointment process, each delivered during a presidential election year with the goal of providing recommendations to the successful candidate about appointing his senior S&T leadership and pursuing sustained improvements in the appointment process. The report examines the most senior S&T appointments to federal government positions and updates the accompanying list of the 50-60 most urgent S&T presidential appointments. This summary highlights the committee's main recommendations.

1. Immediately after the election, the President-elect should identify a candidate for the position of Assistant to the President for Science and Technology (APST). This individual will provide advice, identify, and recruit other science and technology presidential appointees. After inauguration, the President should promptly appoint this person as APST and nominate him or her as the director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP). The director of OSTP should be a cabinet level position, with an office in the Old Executive Office building.

Selection of a confidential adviser on S&T immediately after the election is essential to ensure that assistance is available to the incoming President in identifying the best candidates for key S&T appointments and to provide advice in the event of a crisis or for early implementation of the President's agenda. The APST should have credibility and the respect of the S&T community; an understanding of large research and educational enterprises; background as a practicing researcher (academic or nonacademic); awareness of a wide variety of public policy issues; familiarity with issues in technology and national security, economic development, health and the environment, and international affairs; and the ability to work and communicate with others, including policy makers.

2. The President and the Senate should streamline and accelerate the appointment process for S&T personnel—indeed, all key personnel—to reduce the personal and financial burdens on nominees and to allow important positions to be filled promptly.

Streamlining mechanisms include relying on one system of background checks for the White House and the Senate, clarifying the criteria for the position in question and the principles for questioning nominees, requesting only relevant background information, and keeping the process timely and on track with the goal of completing the appointment process within four months from first White House contact to Senate confirmation.

3. Congress and the Office of Government Ethics should consolidate and simplify appointment policies and procedures to reduce the financial and vocational obstacles to government service.

Mechanisms include standardizing and clarifying pre-employment requirements and post employment restrictions, reducing unreasonable financial and professional losses for those who serve by simplifying financial disclosure reporting requirements, eliminating many of the restrictions associated with the use of blind trusts, and ensuring continuing health insurance and pension plan coverage.

4. Scientific and professional societies should more actively reach out to the APST and other senior administration leadership to provide input that broadens the pool of potential candidates for S&T appointments.

Accomplished and recognized S&T leaders and professional science, engineering, and health societies should propose emerging leaders in their fields to serve in government positions. They should also work to expand junior and senior internship and fellowship programs that provide their members with government and policy experience. Finally, continuing efforts should be made to identify women and members of underrepresented groups for such positions.

5. The President should ensure that his administration makes the process for nominating and appointing people to advisory committees explicit and transparent. The administration should examine current federal advisory committee appointment categories to see that they are appropriate to meet the nation's needs. When a federal advisory committee requires members with scientific or technical proficiency, persons nominated to provide that expertise should be selected solely on the basis of their scientific and technical knowledge and credentials and their professional and personal integrity.

Administration officials should announce the intent to create an advisory committee or appoint new members to an existing committee, and should provide an opportunity for relevant and interested parties to suggest nominees they believe would be good committee members. Efforts are also needed to clarify and identify the conflict of interest principles that will be applied to committee membership and the categories of individual members.

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