McGovern and science

Harry Palevsky's remark that the Scientists for George McGovern group includes "all the people in physics that count" and that sponsors include six Nobel laureates (SN: 8/26/72, p. 140) may have a ringing snob appeal but says little for Palevsky's political acumen in trying to aid McGovern's cause.

K. Frazier's editorial in the same issue notes the effects of this sort of pronouncement, resulting in disenchantment and disappointment (in science) by members of the general public, which science presumably needs for funding, etc. And why will Palevsky's position papers be held back from the public depending on the direction of the campaign? Are his convictions subject to win or lose, or to just good old courage? Shouldn't fruitful thinking by the scientific community be offered to the public regardless?

The letter that "science is slowly dying in this country" is a generality that has been propounded by several in the past. The cosmologist Fred Hoyle in his note needed the decline in quality of our scientific thinking. Whereas the discoveries of the giants of physics were made at relatively low cost, we now have laboratories conducting experiments that cost millions of dollars. Hoyle felt there were a dozen or more great discoveries to be made around the average scientific laboratory and we had the quality of thinking to find them.

Science dying? For want of quantity? Or quality? Or neither?

W.F. Conrad
Pine Valley, Calif.

Editor's note: We contacted Mr. Palevsky to check several questions raised by Mr. Conrad's letter and we published the following response:

W.F. Conrad's letter asking why position papers being written for the McGovern campaign will be "held back from the public depending on the direction of the campaign" is a misinterpretation of what was written in the article by Louise Purrett.

I would like to assure Mr. Conrad that no completed position papers will be withheld from the public. The main concern of the Scientists for George McGovern Organization working together with the Senator and his staff is to be sure that the papers are well prepared and accurately reflect the views of George McGovern. It is precisely for the reason of getting the public's attention focused on scientific matters that the timing of the release of the papers will be tied to a speech or press conference that will be given by the Senator.

Harry Palevsky
Co-Chairman
Scientists for George McGovern
Cambridge, Mass.

Disaster preparedness

Concerning Brent Blackwelder's letter to the editor, criticizing the Federal Government for holding a narrow view of the measures necessary to reduce loss resulting from floods (SN: 7/22/72, p. 50), I invite your attention to our recent report to the Congress on Disaster Preparedness.

As indicated in this report by the Office of Emergency Preparedness and reflecting the contributions and views of all of the Federal departments and agencies, as well as other entities, the Federal Government fully recognizes the need for better land use and construction and other complementary measures in order to reduce the nation's losses due to floods and other types of natural disasters. As a matter of fact, the report calls for action at all levels of government and the private sector to accomplish this purpose.

Robert E. Schnabel
Chief
Disaster Preparedness Division
Office of Emergency Preparedness
Executive Office of the President
Washington, D.C.

Psychology and 'credibility'

I feel impelled to call attention to what I assume to be a misprint in a direct quotation from my presidential address to the American Psychological Association in Honolulu. In your article entitled "Psychologists: In the shadow of Diamond Head" (SN: 9/9/72, p. 166) I am quoted as saying "Psychology cannot be expected to become a national value system . . . . such a state of affairs diminishes credibility, . . . ." The word I used, both in my speech and in the written version, was "credibility." I am heartily in favor of diminishing credibility; it is the lessening of credibility that I oppose.

Anne Anastasi
President
American Psychological Association
Washington, D.C.