Correspondence – National Society of Professional Engineers

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National Society of Professional Engineers

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OFFICE OF THE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

August 9, 1974

The Honorable Jimmy Carter
1974 Campaign Chairman
Democratic National Committee
P.O. Box 1524
Atlanta, Georgia 30301

Dear Governor:

In reply to your July 22, 1974 inquiry, the first recommendation which we would address to political candidates this year would be one dealing with greater utilization of the nation's technological talents. America's engineers have a truly unique expertise which can both aid and expand governmental vision in ways that are essential to the determination of sound national direction.

It is gratifying to know that you recognize the inadequacy of our governmental structure in failing to take full advantage of the country's engineering and other technological resources. Most certainly in the policy making area, as in many lesser governmental functions as well, this nation's technologists are not only available, but eager, to participate in the processes of public policy formulation and implementation. Americans deserve the most competent expert judgment that is available. Without it, the chance of achieving optimum policy decisions and meaningful regulatory implementations are seriously lessened.

For the Government's part, recognition should be afforded this reservoir of talent through establishment of channels for free and ready exchange of communication between the engineering community and decision makers at all levels of governmental endeavor.

By sound governmental actions, moreover, this vast natural resource of technological talent can be made to benefit the public in many other ways. One is Government effort to stimulate the transfer of federally-developed products, processes, and techniques to the solution of a whole host of pressing domestic problems. Particularly at the state and local levels, both in public administration and private industry, greater effort could be made to translate application of the developed space sciences, as an example, to the relief of local conditions such as inadequate housing, poor

transportation facilities, marginal power generation capacities, and a long list of adverse environmental conditions, to mention just a few. Benefits to be derived from more forward-looking activity in the technology transfer and local application field would transcend merely improvement in existing situations. It would provide new and additional employment and employment opportunities, increased industrial capacities, and greater tax revenues for still further future progress.

Since World War II, the Federal role in science and technology has been marked most notedly by fairly extreme fluctuations--influenced mainly by national demands incident to changing security needs and space goals. During this period, the country witnessed both an upsurge in interest--as evidenced by creation in the early '60's of the Office of Science and Technology in the White House, and then a down surge in interest--as evidenced by abolition of that Office in the early '70's. R&D funding also peaked and valleyed during these times.

These wide swings fail to produce the kind of balanced, coordinated, or systematic programming so necessary to achieve and maintain broad national preminence in the technological field. In addition, they generate a plethora of problems which do major disservice to the country.

As the tap is turned on and off in this manner, we are continually beset with either a shortage of trained technical talent or an overabundance; the nation's youth become confused and disillusioned concerning career choices and patterns; the decision makers in the Executive and the Legislative branches of Government are deprived of meaningful assistance; and, the technological community discovers the impossibility of providing the kinds of response which the nation often demands on either a long or short term basis.

Another recommendation which we would address to political candidates this year, therefore, would be one of encouraging high level organizational capacity within the Government to assist its leaders in coordinating, evaluating, and encouraging technological activities across the whole breadth of the governmental spectrum.

There are a number of other issues that concern engineers--some of which concern us along with all other citizens, and others which are of moment particularly to our profession. Possibly we will have the opportunity to discuss them with you in the weeks ahead. A considerable number of specific legislative proposals, in fact, fall within this category.

In closing, it is important to emphasize that the engineering profession is sincerely dedicated to making the fullest contribution of which it is capable to the solution of our country's problems and the betterment of the quality of life in the United States. We do thank you for soliciting our thoughts. And we are anxious to continue this dialogue with you and with those whom you represent.

Very truly yours,

Paul H. Robbins, P.E.
Executive Director