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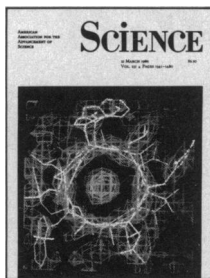
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- **SCIENCE** is published weekly on Friday, except the last week in December, and with an extra issue in February by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1333 H Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005. Second-class postage (publication No. 484460) paid at Washington, DC, and at an additional entry. Now combined with *The Scientific Monthly* © Copyright © 1988 by the American Association for the Advancement of Science. The title **SCIENCE** is a registered trademark of the AAAS. Domestic individual membership and subscription (51 issues): \$70. Domestic institutional subscription (51 issues): \$110. Foreign postage extra: Canada \$32, other (surface mail) \$32, air-surface via Amsterdam \$85. First class, airmail, school-year, and student rates on request. Single copies \$3.00 (\$3.50 by mail); back issues \$4.50 (\$5.00 by mail); Biotechnology issue, \$5.50 (\$6 by mail); classroom rates on request; Guide to Biotechnology Products and Instruments \$16 (\$17 by mail). **Change of address:** allow 6 weeks, giving old and new addresses and seven-digit account number. Authorization to photocopy material for internal or personal use under circumstances not falling within the fair use provisions of the Copyright Act is granted by AAAS to libraries and other users registered with the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) Transactional Reporting Service, provided that the base fee of \$1 per copy plus \$0.10 per page is paid directly to CCC, 21 Congress Street, Salem, Massachusetts 01970. The identification code for *Science* is 0036-8075/83 \$1 + .10. **Postmaster:** Send Form 3579 to *Science*, 1333 H Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005. *Science* is indexed in the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* and in several specialized indexes.
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COVER The gramicidin pore. The molecular structure (yellow) of the gramicidin pore is superimposed on a section of the electron density map derived from gramicidin/cesium crystals. The higher density contours (magenta) correspond to the ion ligands (cesiums and chlorides) located in the center of the pore. The lower density (blue) contours are from the polypeptide chains. See page 182. [B. A. Wallace and K. Ravikumar, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, NY 12180-3590]

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Advertising correspondence should be sent to Tenth Floor, 1515 Broadway, NY 10036. Telephone 212-730-1050 or WU Telex 968082 SCHERAGO.

Influencing Congress: Ten Commandments

At the 1988 New Orleans meeting of the American Physical Society, William Brinkman of AT&T Bell Labs, Harold Hanson of the House Science, Space and Technology Committee, and I gave talks on the funding of physics in the 1990s. Our talks were different in style and approach, but there was one main message that each of us stressed. The divisiveness resulting from one subfield of physics attacking others was hurting the cause of support for physics as a whole, and, for that matter, was hurting the case for the support of science and technology overall. We all emphasized the need to make the case for support of science to both the executive and legislative branches of government, but with some caveats and guidelines. Hanson offered "Ten Commandments for Academics Who Want to Influence Congress." These useful guidelines are presented below for those who might need them.

Thou shalt know thy congressman: get to know the congressman or senator from your district or state on a personal basis. Get close enough to him that he knows your name and who you are and what organization, laboratory, or school you are with.

Thou shalt know about thy congressman: get to know about him so that you don't commit a faux pas that will damage your basic cause. For example, don't rail against pork-barrel politics when you are there trying to bring home a little bacon of your own. It is not likely that the congressman will share all of your political views. However, the only voting record that counts, at the time, is the one he will make on the issue you are pressing.

Thou shalt not limit visitations to crisis situations: make sure that some of the visits are just attitude-enhancing efforts. Visit often for a "hi" and a handshake. The influence you have will fall off inversely as some high power of the length of time between visits.

Thou shalt know the congressman's staff people: all congressmen need help in dealing with a vast plethora of problems. It is the congressman's staff that supply that help. Educating the staff may be as significant as educating the congressman, and staffers can usually give you more time that the congressman can.

Thou shalt have a focused and concise message: the congressman has even less disposable time than you do, so don't overburden him with detail and don't protract the session. There may be no points to be gained by finishing on schedule, but there are definitely points to be lost by not finishing in the time you've been allotted.

Thou shalt not commit effrontery toward someone else's project: be positive about your own shtick, and do not attack another program gratuitously. Congressmen will have to make choices, but they don't appreciate academic intellectuals urging them to scuttle programs to which they are committed.

Thou shalt visit the congressman in his district: when he's not in Washington politicking, he's in his district politicking, and there are ways of showing him at home that there are real votes involved. Also consider volunteering a few hours of your time (or a relative's time) for envelope-stuffing and making phone calls.

Thou shalt get to know who the key congressmen are: know who they are in terms of major committee assignments and make informed liaisons with other scientists who are in the districts served by these key congressmen.

Thou shalt accept a turn-down or set-back graciously: recognize that when the congressman votes contrary to your urging, it won't be because he is ignorant or uninformed. Perhaps his philosophical priorities are different from yours, and, of course, it may be that political considerations dictate a certain vote.

Thou shalt not do thy lobbying like a lobbyist: your competitors for the congressman's attention and vote are professionals with beaucoup bucks at their disposal. Therefore you should forget about inviting him to lunch—or any other blandishments. Just know your facts. Be as straight as you know how to be in making your case, and don't underestimate what the congressman may already know about your problem.

—ALVIN W. TRIVELPIECE