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Becoming the Citizen Scientist: Opportunities and Challenges in Science Policy

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The methodologies, creativity and intellectual capacity of today's physicists are becoming more and more relevant in the world of policy and politics. Some issues such as climate change, alternative energy and avian influenza clearly reveal the relevance of scientific knowledge and research in policy. However, the connection between science and issues such as electronic voting, government earmarks and international cooperation are not as obvious, but the role of scientists in these topics and their effects on science itself are critical. As the world becomes increasingly technological and global, the need for the involvement of scientists in the political process grows. The traditional scientific training of physicists emphasizes intense scrutiny of specific physical phenomena in the natural world but often misses the opportunity to utilize trained scientific minds on some of society's greatest problems. I will discuss the many ways in which scientists can contribute to society far beyond the academic community and the unique opportunities science policy work offers to the socially conscious scientist or even those just looking to get more grant money.