

## **Neo-Conservative Science and Technology Policy - Public policy, Public responsibility and Politics**

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Science and technology policy in the government of the United States has traditionally been an area less subject to partisan politics than other areas of public policy. The ability to steer a course based on merit of scientific knowledge has been a foundation of the government's contributions to the advance of science and technology and its contributions to society.

Yet as science and technology advance and integrate into many facets of modern society, so too does the temptation to bend the course and conduct of science and technology to serve political purposes. The U.S. government's approach to science and technology policy has taken a significant shift in the past four years: "science for politics" has emerged as a dominant theme. This use of science for political ends reflects the enhanced role of science to strengthen political power and ideology, a form of *Neo-Conservative Science and Technology Policy*.

High priority issues in science and technology policy that reflect this paradigm are discussed in this paper and include climate change, the hydrogen economy, stem cells, and ballistic missile defense.

These changes in the science and technology policy paradigm provide an opportunity to view not just a changing approach to issues, but also the interaction of higher level policy shifts with the infrastructure and practices of science and technology. A politically driven approach may lead to less attention given to non-political yet still important issues in science and technology policy such as scientific advice, the physical science base, and the S&T human resources.

In recent years, research evaluation has also been rising in visibility and importance. One question is whether the rising use of program evaluation will improve the performance of government science and technology programs, or whether such methods will also be used for political goals. Early evidence indicates that evaluations are proving effective in improving administration, but not in influencing policy. Although there was initial concern that growing evaluations might intrude on the effective management of government research by emphasizing "what can be measured" rather than "what should be evaluated," the new systems might help to protect valuable parts of the infrastructure, such as merit review, from political intrusion.