

The Republican blueprint

SIR — I disagree with your leading article about the treatment of science in the 1996 Republican platform (*Nature* 382, 655; 1996). Your conclusion that the Republican platform is weak on science is unfair and unfounded. As chairman of the House of Representatives Science Committee and a member of the Platform Committee, I can assure you that the decision of the Republican party was to include in our platform clear language reflecting our commitment to sound science and the role of science in our economy.

Your article leads me to believe that you thought the platform document should be more detailed. Whereas the Democrats pay lip-service to the importance of science with one tiny paragraph in their platform, the Republican party and Bob Dole include science and technology in many parts of our document, demonstrating our realization that science and technology are an integral part of a twenty-first century society, not merely a separate component. The statements made in our platform are reinforced by legislative initiatives in place or under way in Congress. By contrast, the 1996 Democratic platform contains the word 'science' only twice, and does not discuss the importance of basic science at all.

Although the Clinton administration claims to be pro-science, its record shows otherwise. The president does not mention science in his State of the Union addresses. And in his most recent budget, he ignores the importance of science to our economy by opting not to make decisions or prioritize by using plug (notional) numbers for the out-years. The past four years have shown that the Clinton science agenda consists of embracing the status quo and maintaining outdated industrial policies, offering no vision for the future.

The Republican party is different, and the platform document reinforces that difference. Besides devoting an entire section to science, technology and innovation in the twenty-first century, the Republican platform recognizes the benefits of science and technology to improve the standard of living, addresses the need for regulations affecting health, safety and the environment to be based on sound science, and reaffirms our traditional support for medical research through the National Institutes of Health. Our extensive section entitled "A Cleaner, Safer, Healthier America" outlines a positive and proactive agenda based in large part on sound science and technology development. This agenda includes the philosophy that all government environmental decisions are based on "the best peer-reviewed scientific evidence, while encouraging advancements in research...". The Republican commitment to sound science is

reflected in other areas of the document, from defence to energy, with an entire section devoted to space exploration. All of this is lacking in the Democratic platform, despite Clinton's opportunistic statements about increased government support for space in the light of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration discovery about possible life on Mars.

The Republican party platform shows that our party will protect the American technological edge, and encourage and insist on the government's support of the basic scientific research that will result in the new knowledge that is the core of our economic future. Our blueprint for restoring the American dream is bold and visionary — two attributes severely lacking in the Clinton administration's actions or words.

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East and West

SIR — Following a telephone interview, I was quoted (*Nature* 382, 486; 1996) as having said that "it is hard for a westerner to survive in an east German research institute". I did not say that, or anything else that could have been interpreted in that way. And the observation that follows the quotation, that there remains a clash of cultures and difficulties in establishing competitive research programmes, does not reflect the contents of my statements.

To put things straight, I should like to make the following observations. The situation in east Germany as a whole, and therefore also in east German research institutes, is complicated, regardless of whether an individual comes from the east or the west. My appointment in Berlin was for three years, during which I held positions in Berlin and in Munich. When I had to choose between those two locations, I decided on Munich, where working conditions were better for me. But this does not mean that working conditions in Berlin are unmanageable.

As to the clash of cultures referred to in the last sentence of your article, despite the complicated situation arising from the incorporation of East German research institutes into the research landscape of a unified Germany, there has been a strong spirit of cooperation and a willingness to solve problems.

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Positively discriminating

SIR — Later this month, a conference on "Women in Evolution" will be convened at the University of Arkansas. This "gathering of scientific perspectives" will be sponsored by the Sloan and Rockefeller Foundations, the National Science Foundation, the University of Arkansas and the Arkansas Department of Health and Education.

Only women were invited as guest speakers, as the conference will deal with such feminist issues as nitrogen-fixing bacteria, the evolution of malaria, frog evolution, acoustic behaviour, web-spinning spiders and P-transposable elements in *Drosophila*. The conference will also "chart a course of action that will expand the opportunities for women to participate in science at all educational levels". It is presumably for this purpose that Dr Diana Wheeler from the University of Arizona will deliver a lecture on "Evolution of castes in insect societies".

The logistics of such a meeting are probably mind-boggling. For if the choice of participants is made on the basis of possessing an unpaired X chromosome, then people sharing my single-X disposition, such as individuals with Turner syndrome (XO), will be allowed to participate, while individuals with Klinefelter syndrome (XXY) will be excluded. Alternatively, if the determination is made according to the presence of Y, then the situation for the Turners and Klinefelters will be reversed.

Think what havoc this will cause in the lives of genetic mosaics. The conference will also have an adverse economic effect, as obtaining notarized copies of one's DNA sequence of the testis-determining factor gene may be quite expensive. Interestingly, the sponsoring bodies of the "Women and Evolution" conference refused to consider support for a similarly minded meeting entitled "Bearded Jewish Males with a Slight Limp and Evolution", even though such individuals, who have been "marginalized and excluded" in the past, should also be given the opportunity "to reclaim their power through solidarity and education". The foundations persisted in their refusal even when the title has been changed to something significantly less exclusionary: "Partially Bald, Middle Aged, Pot-Bellied Individuals and Evolution". Given that the tests for baldness, age, and abdominal width are much cheaper than karyotypic tests, I find their response quite inexplicable.

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