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PCAST [President's Council of Advisors in Science and Technology]

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December 9, 1991

MEMORANDUM FOR PHILLIP D. BRADY

FROM: ROGER B. PORTER

SUBJECT: Draft Paper from President's Council of Advisors
on Science and Technology (PCAST)

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the draft paper prepared by the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST).

The Administration supports many of the objectives outlined in the paper. It is important, for example, that the United States continue to lead in technology and manufacturing. There is a legitimate Federal role in promoting long-term technological innovation and scientific research and development, particularly basic research.

We have several suggestions that we hope will be helpful.

- While it is true that "much of the modern world was invented and made in America," much of it was invented abroad as well. Accordingly, while we strongly support strengthening U.S. science and manufacturing, we should also make it clear that we oppose technological protectionism or belief that it will improve our position.
- Although the PCAST report discusses the role of the Federal government, it says little about the role of the private sector. Yet the private sector must play the key role in funding long-term U.S. research and development into commercial technologies and accelerating the process of bringing new technologies to market. Mention of this fact might be useful.
- While the Administration has endorsed government support for "generic enabling technology at a pre-competitive stage of development," this term has never been well defined. In the absence of a clear definition, some advocates of an "industrial policy" appear to regard it as another way of channeling government subsidies to selected industries or technologies. Thus, the PCAST recommendation could usefully be clarified to indicate what type of assistance is contemplated.

- On page 3, reference is made to proposing "a federal initiative to revitalize the university research infrastructure," but there is no description of the content of this proposal.
- Finally, much more thinking needs to be undertaken before advancing the notion of major presidential meetings, ala the Education Summit, to deal with "industrial strength as a major national goal." Many presidential summits fail to meet the high expectations that inevitably accompany such an effort. This suggestion deserves to benefit from much more thought and planning regarding goals and how it would be implemented. Until this idea is more clearly thought through, I suggest dropping reference to it in the paper, since it could easily become public that the Administration is considering such an idea.