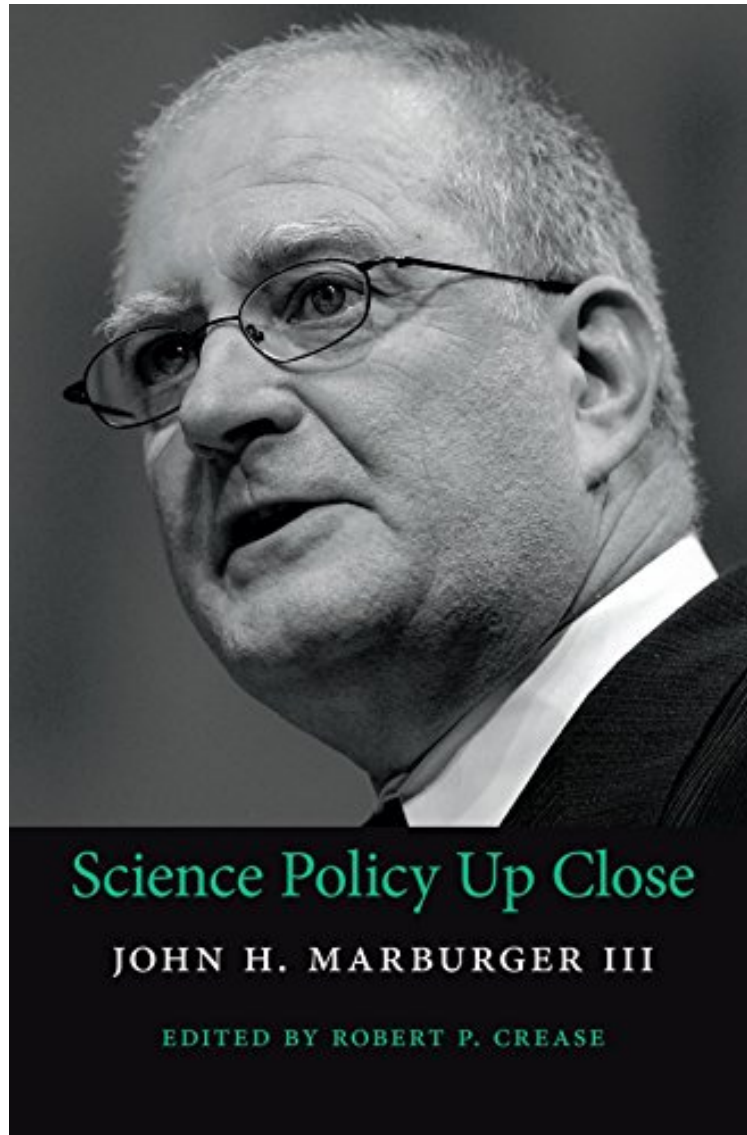



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Science Policy Up Close

John H. Marburger III
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John H. Marburger III : Science Policy Up Close before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Science Policy Up Close:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Should the President's Science Advisor Speak Truth to Power?By Roger D. LauniusJohn H. Marburger III (1941ndash;2011) was a science policy participant through his career. In addition to serving as a physics professor and later a Dean at the University of Southern California and President of Stony Brook University, thereafter he directed Brookhaven National Laboratory and served as Science Advisor and Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy for President George W. Bush between 2001 and 2009. Without question, Marburger had an auspicious career. A colleague at Stony Brook University, philosopher Robert P.

Crease, assembles in *Science Policy up Close* a set of Marburger's previous writings and speeches that amplify his significance, his commitment to effective communication between the scientific community and both politicians and the general public, and a well-received modesty that was a hallmark of his career. Divided into six chapters corresponding to the stages of Marburger's career, "Science Policy up Close" is made up of introductory commentary by Crease setting into context previous writings and speeches by Marburger illuminating the theme of the chapter. There is nothing in the book that was an especially written assessment by Marburger on any aspect of his career. In that sense, this is a work far removed from the memoirs/autobiographies so common among previous public officials. But in another sense, it is a representation of his ideals and priorities in science policy. Marburger honed his skills in 1983 while President of Stony Brook University. The first chapter tells this story, focusing on the Shoreham Commission convened by New York Governor Mario Cuomo to begin the operation of the Shoreham Nuclear Power Plant on Long Island. In a tense environment after the January 1978 breakup of the Soviet Cosmos 954 satellite spreading thousands of pieces of radioactive debris over more than 100,000 square kilometers of northwest Canada, and the accident at Unit 2 of the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant in Pennsylvania in March 1979, fear of nuclear power in any setting quickly eroded. The significance of the Three Mile Island accident to American public perceptions of risk tied to the technology cannot be overestimated. Cuomo charged Marburger's Shoreham Commission to assess the risks of the proposed power plant and to recommend its future direction. Intransigent positions on both sides complicated the task at hand. Marburger, editor Crease insists, was a master of negotiating difficult issues, and the Shoreham Commission served as the first major demonstration of this ability. In essence, Marburger spent considerable time listening to all sides of the argument and in the end wrote a report that dodged a direct recommendation on whether or not to operate the power plant. Marburger and his thirteen-member commission offered only two and a half pages of "general conclusions" and more than 100 pages of dissenting views, clarifications, asides, and additional observations. Marburger's position, as stated in the *New York Times* on December 15, 1983: "In hindsight, I think it [building the plant] was a mistake." But the report did not explicitly state that and did not recommend a firm way forward. Marburger claimed, "The governor didn't want my opinion. He told me that. The governor wanted to know what the situation was. And I delivered that" (New York Times, July 29, 2011). While the plant was completed in 1984, it never entered service, lagging in a netherworld for a decade before eventually being decommissioned in 1994. Marburger claimed this experience as foundational to his approach to dealing with thorny scientific and technological issues in the public sphere. Indeed, his caution as evidenced in this episode became a hallmark of his career. At times, however, it may only be characterized as enervating. The two chapters in this volume on Marburger's stint as Presidential Science Advisor and director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy for President George W. Bush are cases in point. They consist almost entirely of reprints of Marburger's annual addresses to the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). As the person who served longest as science advisor, he had the distinction of giving the keynote at the Science Technology Policy Forum for seven consecutive years. Having attended several of these addresses, I remember being disappointed that Marburger did not take the opportunity to rally support for and not more effectively champion the integrity of scientific inquiry and knowledge to policymakers of the Bush administration. Rereading these addresses conjured those old feelings of remorse once again. Marburger's storied aversion to conflict, his unwillingness to take a forthright stand, and his inclination to go along to get along might have made him a valued member of the Bush administration, but it did not always serve well the people of the nation. Marburger famously commented that his job as science advisor was not "to bargain with senior members of the administration about policy." Marburger studiously avoided becoming embroiled in such debates of global warming, stem cell research, or evolution erupting in the Bush administration. Instead, he concentrated on more mundane issues such as annual budgets for science organizations and the American Competitiveness Initiative (ACI) prioritizing long-term, high-risk research projects. Neither of those endeavors were inappropriate, but not to the exclusion of involvement of those other issues. Marburger claimed that he was not empowered to offer his personal opinion about scientific controversies arising while he served as science advisor. Marburger insisted, as quoted in his *New York Times* obituary, that "I am here to make sure that the science input to policy making is sound and that the executive branch functions properly with respect to its science and technology missions." No doubt his management skills were excellent, but Marburger's defense of the Bush administration raised hackles when such controversies emerged as abstinence-only education, global warming, stem cell research, evolution versus intelligent design, and contentions by the Union of Concerned Scientists that political officials were censoring scientists. *Science Policy up Close* serves as a defense of Marburger's approach to science policy, and in this work he comes across as an effective scientific manager. He efficiently pulled the levers of government on behalf of science, provided he did not have to take a stand in a controversy. This book demonstrates this fundamental reality of Marburger's career. The tragedy of John Marburger III is that as talented, respected, and effective as he could be as a manager—and he was throughout his career—he was ill-suited to provide effective leadership in an era in which science was under assault. In the end, this book celebrates the conversation that must take place between scientists and politicians. Placed in its most positive light, Marburger was respectful of elected officials and their reflection of the views and priorities

of the public. He took seriously the careful airing of all sides of a scientific conflict in its societal context. He did not envision his role as adjudicating divergent priorities, or even calling nonsense on beliefs that are nonsense. Accordingly, this book represents Marburger's take on the interaction between science, technology, and American society in the twenty-first century.

In a career that included Presidential Science Advisor to George W. Bush, John Marburger stood on the front line of battles that pulled science deep into the political arena. Science controversies, he discovered, are never just about science. As his reflections show, science can no longer be shielded from public scrutiny and government supervision.

As a science policy actor on the American stage, Jack Marburger combined the requisite technical expertise with less common virtues: humility and a genuine respect for the views and concerns of citizens. This combination of assets imbued him with an uncommon capacity to navigate politically difficult issues, from controversies over nuclear energy to the divisive politics of the George W. Bush administration. Marburger's writings thus provide not just a valuable insider's view of the art of science policy making, but a civics lesson on what it takes to be an effective public servant. (Daniel Sarewitz, Professor of Science and Society, Arizona State University) An extremely valuable contribution. (Roger Pielke, Jr., Professor and Director, Center for Science and Technology Policy Research, University of Colorado) Marburger examines the interface between science and government through the prism of several complex situations in which he played a central role. The lucid 'memos to self' and public addresses give valuable insights into science policy development over 30 years, and how it must evolve in future. (Paul Grannis, Distinguished Research Professor, Stony Brook University) Among [Marburger's papers] is a long, beautiful letter to a high school student who requested information about the controversial nuclear reactor at Brookhaven National Laboratory. The response not only clearly lays out the pros and cons of the reactor but also considers how a 'reasonable' person should evaluate a controversy, and is characteristic of Marburger's careful presentation of all sides and societal context. This book will prove valuable to those, like Marburger, concerned with the interaction between science and society. (A. M. Saperstein Choice 2015-10-01) About the Author John H. Marburger was Former President of Stony Brook University, Director of Brookhaven National Laboratory, and Science Advisor to President George W. Bush. Robert P. Crease is Professor of Philosophy at Stony Brook University and Co-Editor-in-Chief of *Physics in Perspective*.