Scientific integrity was a high-profile issue under the last administration, but only in a very negative sense, with a continual drumbeat of stories accusing the Bush White House and political appointees of interfering with the proper role of science. President Obama has brought new positive attention to the topic, first with his inaugural address promise to “restore science to its rightful place,” then with a memo on scientific integrity charging the Office of Science and Technology Policy with producing recommendations, which was followed by a call for public comments.

That call has brought a number of comments (which were at one point accessible through OSTP’s web site, but which I wasn’t able to get to this morning), but many of them simply rehash the general call for “non-interference” and seek stronger whistle-blower protections.

The Center for Progressive Reform’s comments are a conspicuous exception, raising subtle issues of transparency and assuring expertise. But even those comments fail to raise issues I would like to see discussed about the nature of civil service employment and the relationship between career employees and political appointees.

When I learned that an organization called Professionals for the Public Interest had launched a new web site, I was hopeful that a group with that name might take a broader perspective. Not so far, though, or at least not in any readily accessible way on their web site. They have a statement on professional integrity that is unexceptional, but bland. They are a coalition, so perhaps they have to satisfy too many cooks to say anything very new or distinctive.

But someone ought to be talking about the structure of public employment. Is civil service reform just too arcane an issue to interest even public employees and government groupies?