

Summary of Commission Retreat Session:

Themes for Final Report and Follow-Up Strategies

Woods Hole, June 28, 1991

At chair **Joshua Lederberg's** invitation to introduce the session, **David A. Hamburg** urged the Commission to produce a final report, although it could, as an alternative, simply point to an array of individual reports. In his view the final report should start with a discussion of why science and technology are important to achieving humanitarian goals—the rationale for creating the Commission. In addition to highlighting the key recommendations of the individual reports, it should formulate the recurrent themes that cut across the substantive activities of the various task forces. The report should assess near-term gains, such as those achieved in the White House, and also the long-term outlook—our hopes for the future. The task force chairs should have the first crack at deciding what is essential from their areas of work. There needs to be a small drafting group, pooled from among the Commissioners and Advisory Council members, who would work closely with the Chairs and David Robinson.

Regarding dissemination, Hamburg stressed the need for both an “insider’s strategy” and one involving nongovernmental mechanisms, including the media, in order to influence government. His commitment from the very beginning, when this first-rate group was put together, has been a wide dissemination effort, noting that Carnegie Corporation is not hindered, as so many organizations are, by an inability to fund dissemination activities.

With regard to audience, Hamburg said the final report should be distributed to federal and state policy makers and to scholars, and also to the educated public, given the right form of exposition. There should be extensive free mailings, op-ed pieces contributed by members of the Commission and the Advisory Council, one or more press conferences, and personal meetings with the policy community and also with the scientific and public administration communities, as there is no substitute for face-to-face meetings in which people can hear what the Commission said and why it said it. He noted that all of these dissemination activities would heavily involve members of the Commission and the Advisory Council.

Hamburg raised the possibility of periodic reconvening of the Commission, to review the implementation status of the Commission’s recommendations or to revise some recommendations to accommodate intervening events. Such a convocation could be a very high-visibility national or international occasion if there were an opportunity to get higher on the national agenda.

Hamburg noted that during his nine years the foundation has developed “policy linkage” and even “media linkage” as a high art form in which experts in the field meet with leading serious and high-quality policy-makers, policy advisors, and media

people in mini-retreat settings (like Woods Hole). This is expensive, but there may be circumstances for which the expense is worthwhile.

Regarding “life after death” for the Commission, Hamburg indicated that from the beginning there was a hope that there would be one or two or three places where the Commission’s business on S&T and government would be continued—analytical work, publications, lectures, convening functions, consulting functions. He had thought of these primarily based at universities, but a scientific organization or a policy analysis organization are also possibilities. He envisions seeding quality existing organizations rather than starting new organizations, possibly with joint sponsorship from other foundations such as MacArthur and Sloan. The time scale under discussion is the five years remaining in his term as president of Carnegie Corporation, with the possibility that some grants could be made at the end of his term that would carry over two or three years beyond it; therefore we are looking at a five-to-seven year period. Finally, he urged the Commission to try to get the government itself to support serious analytical work on science, technology, and government.

Hamburg reiterated that he sought the Commissioners’ guidance on these activities, but warned that the guidance would have “terrible reverberations” for the Commissioners because he and others would be “on their case” to make all this happen.

Discussion

Lewis Branscomb agreed with David Hamburg that implementation is key, citing **Harvey Brooks’s** notion that one should do policy *design* rather than policy *analysis*. Hamburg responded to Branscomb’s question about whether to wait for the final report by saying that individual reports should be vigorously pushed to their own constituencies when they are published.

David Robinson cited Avery Russell as one expert who says that individual reports have a much better chance of being pushed due to their specialized nature, but the final report must be more than just a compilation of the other reports if it is to receive much attention; it has to have something exciting in it.

Branscomb said the big challenge on the final report is to have “one giant ‘Ah Ha!’” Hamburg added that the final report offers an important opportunity for enriching the work by developing recurrent themes of integrated concepts; to which, he said, he hoped that Joshua Lederberg would address himself, although he didn’t want to put Josh on the spot. Lederberg indicated that he would be counting on a lot of help from **Jesse Ausubel** and others.

Jerome Wiesner mentioned that a large audience for our words is important. Before we can be convincing, we ourselves must understand how the world is changing in terms of science and technology.

Richard Celeste's point one is that, although an insider strategy has merit since our goal is to affect the decision-making process, there needs to be an audience beyond the insiders if one wants to have long-term impact, as well as building constituencies and reaching the popular imagination. This means the final report has to be dramatically different from what we have issued so far. Point two is that we all have the sense that changes in the world are bigger than the specifics we have discussed and that the U.S. is lagging behind some other countries in its development and that science and technology can help us catch up. Moreover, it is generally assumed that the U.S. leads the world in university research and post-graduate studies but from what he has heard in the last thirty six hours, we are in danger of losing our lead here; this can tie in to the popular imagination. Point three is that we need to set specific benchmarks and follow up to see if we have achieved them. Last, we should try to translate some of what we are about into images that can be communicated electronically via CNN, PBS, or NPR to the generation that is looking over our shoulders.

Shirley Hufstedler said it would be good to have a national assessment of how we are doing in science and technology every five years at least. It is important to define the criteria by which success will be measured.

Rodney W. Nichols noted that Congressional hearings should be considered as conduits for disseminating and implementing the reports. David Hamburg noted that some of the mini-retreat "policy links" he mentioned should be primarily congressional. Nichols continued by observing that soon there will be a presidential election, and in the midst of the campaign, few will be interested in taking time off from electioneering to hear about intellectual things.

Sheila Widnall observed that NSF is the only place in town for funding fundamental engineering research—chemical, civil, mechanical, and computer. Aeronautics has a special problem right now because NASA has abandoned it totally and NSF won't touch it.

Eugene Cota-Robles said he would like to stress the issue of service, that is science in the service of the national good.

Robert Solow said the final report should go only a little bit beyond the Commission's reports and that we should stick to what we can back up out of our own work. We should stay away from the economic competitiveness issue even though it provides part of the interest and emotion. Several participants responded to the latter remark, including Hamburg who said he assumed that it would be legitimate and proper and even desirable to attempt some kind of innovative statement out of what comes from the Inman, Perry, and Brademas task forces bearing on economic competitiveness. Solow agreed, but said that he thought that the Inman report's output is weak, acknowledging that he was one of the forces that made it weak. Lederberg said that the final report would have a place for critical commentary on the Commission's own work.

Richard Atkinson stated that he would like to put a lot of weight on individual reports. Each report should be strong, and pushed independently. However, the final report should, as Josh suggested earlier, focus on the broader set of principles that guided the Commission's decision-making discussions. In other words, the final report should stress principles, while citing individual reports for specific recommendations.

Joshua Lederberg responded that the final report is not the best place for individual recommendations, but rather how we thought about the problem.

Herbert York noted that the issue of personnel in the government needs to be emphasized in the final report, especially the connection between structure and people—the structure affects the kind of people who are going to fill the structure, and the ability to recruit them out of the pool that's out there, especially in those areas where going to the government is not helpful to a career.