

It's time to be productive, proactive

Science leaders urged to take charge at December meeting

By Gaylen Bradley, CSSP Board member

More than 90 scientists, science educators and science policy leaders convened in the headquarters of the American Chemical Society in Washington D.C. to exchange information, share views and propose alternative strategies to address current and anticipated challenges at the beginning of December.

The meeting schedule had been changed from a start date on Saturday to a start date on Thursday in order to accommodate the newly confirmed officials of the Obama Administration, as the conference in Copenhagen on climate change required many of these officials to travel or to fill in for their executive officers who were traveling. The schedule change also caught CSSP Chair Bill Carroll in transit from Geneva to Washington DC. Carroll delivered his welcome and charge as an audio presentation. Bill posed the question: "What are the career opportunities for talented high school students pursuing a career in scientific research?"

President and Executive Officer Martin Apple gave a detailed analysis of the State of Science and set forth his Grand Challenges for the Winter 2009 CSSP meeting. Marty's emphasis was on "Needed Now: Scientist Leaders to Guide the 21st Century Productively, Proactively." The first challenge is to enable each scientific society to thrive during the current economic crisis. The current decade is the "E-period: Environment, Energy, Education and Economy." Society presidents' greatest risk is to stop taking risks. Marty cautioned that no one discipline has a monopoly on the knowledge or skills to solve the grand challenges and that an integrated network of scientists is required. Marty identified the 10 leading challenges as restoration of the water ecosystem, population control, sustainable energy, improved mathematics and science education, new economic models not dependent on population or biosphere degradation, food security, understanding human behavior, control of disease and interfacing discovery science and technology.

Several areas were identified as failures in leadership by universities but important to professional scientific societies: allowing themselves to be directed by the federal and commercial interests; increasing

costs of education that deter access; avoiding responsibility for K-12 education; inability to document the value of their activities; and allowing intellectual pursuits not funded by extramural grant to wither. Marty offered the view that the much anticipated Copenhagen World Meeting on Climate Change will not meet the most optimistic expectations but that scientist need to push ahead in providing solutions, such as alternative energy sources. In addition, the feasibility of carbon capture needs to be assessed, and well as population mitigation. Efficiency and conservation are important goals in the energy equation. There are cautionary notes on controlling the ecosystem: intervene only when necessary to the extent required; intervene in steps that are reversible; and evaluates interventions before implementation as well as monitor after implementation. Economic models must move away from short-term return to shareholders and consider the environment as one of the stakeholders. All leadership, including scientific and academic leadership, must seek opportunities, focus on value, act expeditiously pull together teams, remove barriers, empower others to act, and persevere.

Apple reviewed the mega trends that have an impact on scientific societies (e.g., members wanting services a la carte) demand for transparency in association activities, and expanded use of web-based communication. It is a time for leadership that involves establishing directions, aligning people and motivating participants. The goal is to thrive, find opportunity and to centralize spending while decentralizing innovation and learning. Above all: don't panic, identify key issues and have face-to-face dialog. He took the group through an exercise in overcoming barriers to innovation in their organizations.

At the end of the regular program, the CSSP Council received the reports of the committees and selected officers for 2010: Artie Bienenstock (APS) as Chair; George Corcoran(SOT) Chair-elect; Bill Carroll ,Past Chair; Sabine O'Hara (SEE) secretary; John Sharp Jr.(GSA) treasurer; Bill Thomas as Past Treasurer, and members at large - Thoman Bohan, Deborah Bronk, Richard Duschl (NARST), Joseph Francisco(ACS) and Ralph James (SPIE).

The evening awards banquet celebrated the ethical standards leadership of Harvard provost David Korn, who served as Dean of Medicine at Stanford University and as Vice president of the Association of American Medical Colleges. David Korn spoke about ethics in clinical trials, including both individual and institutional conflicts of interest.