

Committee on Public Affairs and Public Relations

Report to the ACS Board of Directors

The Board Standing Committee on Public Affairs and Public Relations (PA&PR) met virtually on August 2, 2016. The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming new Committee member ACS president Donna Nelson, giving an overview of the meeting agenda, and reviewing Committee reference materials in the agenda book.

The Chair provided an opportunity for ACS president-elect Allison Campbell to outline for the Committee her 2017 plans for advocacy and Capitol Hill outreach. She described her initial efforts to create a working group that would collaborate with the ACS Office of Public Affairs in creating sustainable, affordable and substantive opportunities for interactions with Capitol Hill stakeholders aimed at raising the visibility of funding for the chemical sciences and the multiple benefits attendant to that funding.

The Chair then called the Committee's attention to the schedule and operation of the ACS Press Center at the Philadelphia national meeting as well as a half-day Communications symposium arranged by OPA that culminates in a special reception honoring Peter Atkins, 2016 winner of the Grady Stack Award for Interpreting Chemistry for the Public.

Approval of Minutes – There being no additions or corrections noted, save for the previously recommended inclusion of a drug's generic name in addition to its trade name, the minutes of the June 3, 2016 meeting were adopted as distributed.

Volunteer Engagement Research - The Chair introduced the first agenda item, which focused on external research funded by the National Science Foundation and conducted by researchers from Michigan State University and the University of Texas at Austin. The goals of the research are to develop a greater understanding of the motivations for scientific society volunteers to become involved with community outreach and to help identify ways those volunteers could communicate more strategically.

One of the researchers, Dr. John Besley, Michigan State University, joined the call and presented the topline findings of the research that covered volunteers from several different scientific societies, which encompass multiple disciplines. OPA, working with colleagues from the ACS Membership & Scientific Advancement Division, facilitated the involvement of ACS members in the research project.

Focusing on ACS members, Dr. Besley reported that those surveyed indicated a relatively high willingness to engage with the adult public (the study did not cover outreach activities involving children). This finding was especially true for face-to-face communication and for engagement with policymakers, but somewhat less so for engagement via the media and online. The members also said they expected the engagement experience to be enjoyable. Furthermore, although our members think they are only moderately effective in their outreach efforts, they say that such efforts can make a difference. This finding may suggest that if members were aware of, and made use of, available tools and training on the ACS website that their comfort level with public engagement might rise. The most often reported goals that our members have for engaging with the public include increasing the role of science in guiding public policy and getting fellow citizens to value the role of science in our culture. Next steps in the study include further clarification of which variables constitute the best predictors of scientists' engagement and comparing views held by academic scientists with those of their industry colleagues.

Helium Supply for Research – The Committee received a presentation on a report -- *Responding to the U.S. Research Community's Liquid Helium Crisis: An Action Plan to Preserve U.S. Innovation* – that was prepared by a team consisting of members from the ACS, the American Physical Society and the Materials Research Society.

ACS member and report co-leader, Dr. Simon R. Bare, SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory, joined the call to provide background on the helium availability issues being faced by researchers. Specifically, he discussed the predictability of helium's availability and its ever increasing price, and how those issues are undermining research and in turn U.S. innovation. He outlined five major recommendations included in the report that, if favorably acted upon, would help assure a sustainable and affordable supply of helium for U.S. researchers.

After discussion of the report and its recommendations, the Committee VOTED by voice to adopt the report as a document of the Society to be released in conjunction with the American Physical Society and the Materials Research Society, as well as to make its government-facing recommendations ACS public policy positions.

ACS Biennial Public Policy Priority Statement – The Committee was updated on progress being made towards finalization of the 2017-18 ACS Biennial Public Policy Priorities Statement that will be before the Committee for action at its December 2016 meeting.

Input on the new statement has been sought from 18 ACS committees. OPA staff presented the latest draft of the statement incorporating input from those committees received to date. After a brief discussion, the Chair recommended that Committee members look over the draft statement and be prepared to offer additional feedback in preparation for the December meeting.

OPA Reports – OPA staff presented a quick review of recent federal legislative action favorable to ACS policy priorities as well as a look ahead at possible additional actions that may be addressed when Congress returns after the November elections.

New Business – ACS past-president Diane Grob Schmidt provided the Committee with a brief summary of the June 28-29 visit of a Cuban science delegation from the Cuban Chemical Society, the University of Havana and the Cuban National Academy of Science. The June visit included a welcome dinner hosted by past-president Schmidt, a National Press Club Panel discussion focused on current and future Cuban and U.S. scientific collaboration, visits to Capitol Hill and the National Science Foundation and a reception in honor of the delegation at ACS headquarters that included science attachés from a variety of embassies.

Adjournment

There being no additional business, the Committee adjourned at 3:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. John Adams, Chair