2007 Report of the AIP Advisory and Liaison Committee on Public Policy (ALCPP)

Introduction
The ALCPP met on March 1, 2007 at the American Center for Physics in College Park, MD. Committee members or substitutes present were: Janice Reutt-Robey, AVS; Sugata Tripathi, AAPM; William Yost, ASA; Eric Betterton, AGU; Charles Holbrow (chair), AAPT; Bernard Khoury, AAPT and MGRC chair; James Tsang, APS; Laura Kolton, OSA. AGU staff members Kathy O’Riordan and Kate von Holle also participated in the committee’s discussions. Also present were AIP senior management Marc Brodsky, Fred Dylla, James Stith, and Alicia Torres along with MGR staff Audrey Leath, Martha Heil, Jennifer Greenamoyer, and Turner Brinton.

The committee was deeply impressed by the energy and dedication of the staff. They are engaged in a remarkable spread of activities and clearly committed to realizing the numerous goals they have set for themselves. We particularly wish to express our admiration for their sustained and thoughtful efforts to help AIP keep non-science out of science education. We also appreciate the open, informative, and hospitable attitude of all the staff. We thank all of you for making our visit informative and pleasant.

The summary below emphasizes topics that resulted in recommendations or comments.

Member Societies Set AIP’s Agenda
MGR staff, ably led by Alicia Torres, gave ALCPP a thorough overview of current and anticipated activities of MGR. They emphasized that their activities are shaped by the public policy concerns of the Member Societies.

Marc Brodsky described a new procedure to expedite AIP’s endorsement of positions of member societies supporting or calling for public action. The procedure applies to a limited number of areas chosen by the AIP Board. In 2007 there are two such areas: (1) Teaching of Science; (2) Funding of Science Education and Research and Development. Such endorsements can be issued only if both the Executive Officer and the Chair of the Board agree and if after 48 hours of receiving a copy of the item being endorsed the cognizant officers of the Member Societies make no substantive objection.

ALCPP noted that the areas are identified so broadly that AIP has great latitude in what may be endorsed by the fast process.

Top Priority
ALCPP also noted that Funding of Science Education and Funding of Research and Development are two separate undertakings. They questioned whether it was appropriate to treat them as a single area for expedited endorsements.
ALCPP commends MGR on its close attention to efforts to increase funding for basic research. Whether this is the president’s ACI or the Congressional program to foster innovation, ALCPP recommends AIP through MGR and other means:

- continue vigorously to support legislation to increase federal support for basic research. Make this an item of highest priority for MGR.
- strongly publicize and urge support for Speaker Pelosi’s proposal to double federal funding for basic research and development in the physical sciences.

In dealing with the immediacy of education issues and the prospects for increased funding for basic research, we should not lose sight of the fundamental importance of energy and the need for policies that increase efficiency, achieve a balance of sources, recognize connections between energy and climate, and support basic research in energy sciences. We recommend that the AIP Board:

- develop a statement that will guide AIP staff in their activities supporting member societies’ efforts to foster and support such policies.

Education and Teaching
MGR staff instigated a lively discussion of education issues by showing data exhibiting both a decline in American preeminence in high technology and a low level of proficiency of American students in science. The committee was concerned with the problems, but expressed some doubt about whether the two declines are related and about whether improved science teaching and increased science education would have a positive effect on innovation or job growth.

Noting that Congress is at the moment attentive to ideas for improving science education as evidenced by the large number of bills filed so early in this session, MGR staff asked ALCPP to provide criteria by which to choose from the among the proposed bills those on which AIP should concentrate its resources. ALCPP did not do this partly because they needed more time to think about the question than was available and partly because they were unconvinced that the proposed legislation addressed the most pressing questions. What about accountability? What about testing? What should standards be and who should set them?

Large Issues and ALCPP
It is important that ALCPP deal with such important issues, but they can do this only if they prepare more thoroughly. For future meetings we recommend that:

- committee members – particularly the committee chair – and staff identify and include in the agenda one or two issues of large magnitude and importance
- the committee and AIP staff together formulate possible policy alternatives and pose them as requests for advice and recommendations
- at least two weeks before the meeting alert ALCPP members as to what the issue(s) will be and send a compact summary of background information on the issue(s).
Richard Jones’ FYI updates continue to be particularly useful in keeping ALCPP members informed about public policy matters. To extend the impact and accessibility of FYI, we recommend that MGR
  • make FYI available by RSS feed.

Evolution and Science: Fostering Public Policy Activities in Societies and Locally
An account of ongoing attempts by opponents of the ideas of evolution to introduce non-science into the science curricula of elementary and high schools served as a backdrop to a description of AIP’s efforts in concert with many other professional societies to explain to school boards and parents why it is important to keep non-science out of science education. Several ALCPP members expressed appreciation for the amicus brief that puts forth coherent well reasoned arguments for the position of the societies.

There was an informative presentation of the results of two professional assessments of what arguments are effective in marshalling support for good quality science education. Eighty percent of responses said that the reasons to study science are “to learn how to draw conclusions from evidence”, “to prepare for college or a career”, and “to learn how to think critically”. There was widespread opposition to government legislation of moral values and strong support for a strong wall separating church and state.

ALCPP commends the vigorous work of MGR to educate the public about the dangers of attempts to introduce non-science issues into science courses. We strongly recommend that
  • AIP continue its collaboration with other societies to assert the need to keep science education free of religious and political issues.
  • ALCPP members inform their respective societies of the ongoing work of AIP in this area and warn their societies of the continuing need for their vigilance
  • ALCPP member societies encourage their members to be involved with their local schools and their local school boards.
  • AIP develop a short guide to show scientists how to get involved in school board politics and be effective there

We strongly praise the ongoing efforts of MGR to foster awareness of public policy issues in the member societies. An important part of these efforts is to activate society members to interact with their representatives in the House and Senate. This can be done
by organized emailings; it can be done by direct contact with representatives. ALCPP was strongly impressed by the need for more such contact. We recommend that MGR

- publicize more directly to the member societies AIP capabilities for organizing emailings
- energetically pursue its offer to arrange meetings of physicists visiting the DC area with their representatives
- prepare a short guide for how a physicist can best be effective in such visits
  - hide your arrogance
  - be specific
  - come with a definite request – the “ask”
  - focus on the needs of your locality

**Learning What Others Are Doing**
There was general appreciation among the ALCPP members of the opportunity to hear of the public policy concerns of their sister societies. This is a valuable part of our liaison function, i.e., liaison with each other. We recommend that

- ALCPP members be asked to bring to the meeting and distribute a summary, no more than one-page long, of the three most important public policy concerns and actions of their society

**Government Fellowships**
As always we appreciated hearing from current government fellows. The importance of this program is undoubted and, in principle, it merits expansion. However, it seems unrealistic to expect to get much money from those member societies whose members are unlikely to become fellows. We note that MGR did not follow up on last year’s ALCPP recommendation that AIP actively pursue private funds for fellowships. Using private money as matching money, you might be able to obtain further support from the member societies. We strongly recommend that

- AIP seek private funds for support of additional government fellowships

**Improving the Functioning of ALCPP**
We believe that with the assistance of MGR, ALCPP could function more efficiently and communicate more effectively. To these ends we recommend that

- the committee’s charge be reviewed and clarified
- materials sent to ALCPP members be reduced in amount by elimination of information items that can be made available online, and by using abstracts and executive summaries
- member societies be explicitly encouraged to send as representatives members who are engaged with or interested in issues of public policy
- the chair of ALCPP be a member of the AIP Board of Directors.

Prepared and submitted on behalf of the AIP Advisory and Liaison Committee on Public Policy,

--Charles H. Holbrow, chair