

Councilor Bulletin

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ACS, Chemistry, and the Grand Challenges Facing Science and Society

Bassam Z. Shakhshiri, ACS President

ACS COUNCIL MEETING

Wednesday
August 22, 2012
8:00 a.m.

Philadelphia
Marriott -
Downtown
Grand Ballroom
A-F



Peter Cutts Photography

We live in the most advanced scientific and technological society in history. New discoveries have led to personal and societal enlightenment, to improvements and benefits in our daily lives, but also to new societal problems. Basic research in science has greatly increased our understanding of nature, expanded frontiers of inquiry, shown us how little we know, triggered creative waves of invention and innovation, and prompted technological breakthroughs that were inconceivable just a few short decades ago. Yet, many people around the world are still insulated from much of the modern advancement in such fields as agriculture, medicine, healthcare, housing, communications, and transportation, and are thus deprived of their benefits. The wide gap between those of us who flourish because of advances in science and technology and those who do not is deeply disturbing. It is astonishing that 1.1 billion people in the world live on less than \$1 a day, as reported by the World Bank. Science and technology can affect the quality of life around the globe and we must be wise in the use of technology every-

where.

Chemistry brings a wide range of goods and functions to everyone and thus is vital to our democracy. Chemistry is

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the key to eradicating disease and reducing poverty. Our research and our technology can provide clean water and nutritious food, meet energy demands, and help lead to sustainable development everywhere. And, just as important, chemists can help society develop *the will* to improve the quality of life on the planet.

We all do what we do because it interests us, it satisfies our curiosity, and we enjoy it. However, we have a responsibility to humanity as a whole. Science and society have what is essentially a social contract that enables great intellectual achievements but comes with mutual expectations of benefiting the human condition and protecting our planet. We are now enjoying and also grappling with all the consequences of the Industrial Revolution. We should be thinking about all aspects of the Electronic Revolution.

Today our biggest challenge

is to help sustain Earth and its people in the face of

- Population growth
- Finite resources
- Malnutrition and obesity
- Spreading disease
- Deadly violence
- War
- Climate change
- Denial of basic human rights, especially the right to benefit from scientific and technological progress.

The solutions to these grand challenges are scientific and technological and thus are relevant to ACS and its members. ACS and its members must continue to make major contributions to improve the quality of life in America and to advance the human condition around the globe. That is what we say clearly in our mission statement: *advance the broader chemistry enterprise and its practitioners for the benefit of Earth and its people.*

However, technical solutions are not sufficient and chemists cannot solve these problems alone. ACS, in keeping with its mission and its Congressional Charter, must carefully select areas where we can be most effective and vigorously pursue strategies to help develop the political *will* of our people and government to act

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responsibly. The nature of such advocacy for societal political and cultural change has to be studied, developed, and articulated clearly by the ACS Council and Board of Directors. This advocacy is not a simple task, but it is in keeping with our stewardship of the chemical enterprise.

ACS relies on our judgment as Councilors to define and address various issues facing our chemical enterprise. The collective talent and wisdom of the Council must always have the greatest influence possible on policy matters affecting ACS and its appropriate role in the chemical enterprise and in society at large. Our Strategic Plan is essentially a management tool to guide the conduct of our programs and operations and in this regard we

are well served. We also do exceedingly well in our publications and scientific communications areas, but we must be careful as other major players are catching up with us.

Through its publications and its program offerings at scientific meetings ACS provides platforms for highly technical discussions on a wide variety of scientific and technological topics. We formally express our views through policy statements about a wide range of concerns including global warming, public and private support for research and for education, employment of chemical scientists, freedom of inquiry, the ethical responsibilities of scientists, and many others. Our technical divisions have the capacity to contribute to solving some of the global societal challenges and perhaps some will

come forward with suggestions for certain courses of action by ACS. Local sections should be strong bases for community engagement in all matters related to the role of science and technology in society.

So, what is (are) the appropriate role(s) for ACS in addressing any or all of today's grand challenges to science and society? These are matters for the entire Council and its committees to consider and to decide. In San Diego we discussed the ACS Climate Science Toolkit and in Philadelphia we will discuss the role of ACS in alleviating the global water crisis. I have high expectations that, as Councilors, we will fulfill our obligations and meet our responsibilities to ACS, to science, and to society. Thank you.