



From the President

The Essential and the Nonessential

"Gas prices topped \$3/gallon for the second year in a row..."

"The [Aletsch Glacier in Switzerland] has retreated 2.1 miles since 1860..."

"U.S. bird flu study predicts millions of deaths, billions in losses"

Reading the newspaper these days is not a low-stress activity; it's hard not to become alarmed. Even harder, perhaps, is to know how to respond. Although the scientific community has led the way by alerting society to such problems as global warming, an impending energy crisis, and the danger of worldwide pandemics, it can be difficult to know precisely what to do. The sheer complexity of the problems, coupled with institutional inertia, the constraints of funding, and the limitations of our own research framework, may lead one to believe that as individuals we can have little impact.

But science today is not a profession that can be practiced in isolation. The problems at the forefront of research require solutions spanning so many disciplines that scientists are essentially forced to collaborate. This will come as no revelation I'm sure; virtually every institution involved in the scientific enterprise is restructuring its program in some way to encourage teamwork on specific problems. Recent U.S. Dept. of Energy calls for proposals in the solar energy and hydrogen storage areas are examples of this.

I believe ECS and other professional societies have a vital role to play in helping individuals create and nurture the collaborations that are necessary to respond to today's scientific challenges.

This happens in several ways, some more subtle than others. Clearly, meetings sponsored by ECS provide a way to become "plugged in" and

updated. The vitality of our Society in this regard was evident at our Denver meeting, which included 38 symposia and nearly 1,300 papers on topics including hydrogen production and storage, methanol fuel cells, ULSI, and biosensors. Plenary lectures, such as those given recently by Nathan Lewis and Ralph Overend, provide members with the big picture on current topics such as energy and global warming. In a less obvious but perhaps just as important way, however, our international gatherings allow us to extract ourselves from the clamoring (and often nonessential) demands of life at the office so that we can focus on critical issues.

I think there's even more to it than that, however.

Professional societies remind us that science is essentially a community effort. All of us, even those of us not involved in multi-institution projects, rely on a network of interactions created by the exchange of information, a concept developed from the earliest days of modern science. Scientists formed societies for good reason: face-to-face communication is often the most effective way to transmit information. Next best are written publications. Scientific bodies, such as The Royal Society, the Académie Royale des Sciences, and the Deutschen Chemischen Gesellschaft, were the first to initiate these as a means of creating a permanent record of progress.

It's easy to overlook the massive effort required to keep these activities

going. To run ECS takes literally hundreds of volunteers and a highly competent headquarters staff. Someone must take responsibility for organizing symposia, reviewing papers, selecting meeting sites, teaching short courses... the list goes on and on. There are thirteen Division executive committees, a dozen standing committees, and six subcommittees overseeing and conducting this business.

Setting priorities surely is one of the great challenges of modern life. I know of no one in my peer group who isn't having trouble coping with the sheer volume of activities with which they have to contend. Add to that the demands of family life; a typical week in my family includes soccer, swimming, ballet, piano lessons... It can be tempting to relegate our professional obligations to the back burner.

For me, ECS is an essential activity. Not only is it my scientific home, it is also a place of like-minded, vibrant, and creative people who leave me inspired at the conclusion of every meeting. It is indeed an honor to serve as president of this organization.

Please feel free to contact me at any time; it will be a pleasure to hear from you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Mark".

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