



ASSOCIATION AFFAIRS

McCarthy: Share the Excitement of Discovery with the Public

The world's oceans are restless, wide-ranging, and unconcerned with borders—and they may have met their match in James McCarthy. Early in his career, he was drawn to oceanography as a chance to “work across boundaries,” delving into biology, chemistry, and geology in waters around the globe. As he assumes the AAAS presidency in February, he sees the future of science similarly driven by interdisciplinary research, outreach to scientists in developing nations, and the intersection of science and policy to address international issues.

Global climate change is one such issue that has occupied McCarthy for decades, starting with his own research interests in marine plankton and biogeochemical cycles, and extending to his leadership in national and international groups such as the International Geosphere-Biosphere Program and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and as the Alexander Agassiz Professor of Biological Oceanography at Harvard University.

“I’ve spent much of my time for the last 25 years working to bring groups of scientists together who had historically worked alone in their own disciplinary communities, to work across boundaries to generally explore common territory and look for exciting new directions in science,” he said in an interview.

McCarthy said his work on climate change has drawn him inevitably across the research border toward science policy and science education, where he sees many opportunities to strengthen the ties between science and society. In particular, he says, scientists need to be better at communicating the exciting nature of their profession to young people.

“It’s very interesting talking to high school and college students about the problems that we

face today with respect to climate change, the realization that everything we know that makes this problem urgent has been discovered in their lifetime,” he said. Unfortunately, he added, many young people see science as a static set of textbook facts rather than a dynamic process.

“We often underestimate the ‘wow!’ factor, the realization that those of us who have decided to spend our careers in science are every day finding something exciting,” he noted, joking that “it’s certainly very different from the way most of my colleagues would describe their careers in business or law or in medicine.”

McCarthy thinks that working with science museums, giving public lectures, and contributing science coverage in

the media are all ways that researchers can increase the public’s appreciation of science. But he acknowledged that the press and scientists “come from different cultures” and are not always natural allies.

“I like to think that when I talk to a person from the press, it’s not a source and a reporter interacting, it’s two of us together on an educational mission,” he explained. “And that’s tough to sell, because some people in the press say no, science is just another interest group and you’re trying advance your hobby horse.”

He is adamant about the fact that science is not “just another special interest group,” a characterization he’s also encountered when testifying before the U.S. Congress. Too often, McCarthy said, politicians dismiss a scientist’s testimony as “just your idea,” and miss the fact that “science is based on evidence. They don’t appreciate that science is not simply a collection of ideas, and that scientists only maintain their scientific excellence by constantly questioning, constantly being skeptical, and always

being open to new evidence and new interpretations of evidence.”

“One of the realizations of this [U.S. presidential] election year is that we really must restore the scientific integrity of our federal government,” McCarthy said. He suggested that the scientific community has been “distressed” in recent years to see federal reports in which “the best representations of science performed by experts widely revered in their field... have been edited, and clearly by people who did not know or understand the science, but who didn’t like the message.”

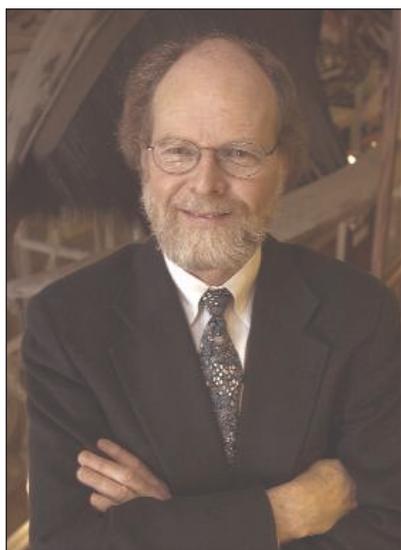
McCarthy is heartened by the fact that many of the U.S. presidential candidates from both major parties have accepted the research consensus on global climate change and have included climate policy proposals in their campaign platforms. “But the formulation of the policy needs more information than just, ‘we have a problem.’ And here the scientific and engineering communities have a very important role to play,” he said.

In December, the U.S. Congress voted on an omnibus appropriations bill that would fund federal research and development at levels far below what was expected for fiscal year 2008. Researchers should argue strongly for the larger economic benefits of R&D, McCarthy suggested. While he doesn’t “have any illusions that the new president will magically be able to dig us out of the hole we’re in right now,” he urged that “the science community must be ready to help a new Administration in any way we can.”

AAAS “is very keen” to build on the theme of this year’s Annual Meeting, “Science and Technology from a Global Perspective,” and find more ways to support the travel and professional expenses of researchers from developing nations, McCarthy said. His own work with the IPCC convinced him that the organization’s reports “could not have had the success that they did without the participation of developing nations.”

McCarthy will succeed the current president, Nobel laureate David Baltimore of the California Institute of Technology, at the close of the 2008 Annual Meeting on 18 February. Baltimore will become chair of the AAAS board as John Holdren, director of the Woods Hole Research Center and Teresa and John Heinz Professor of Environmental Policy at Harvard University, steps down. Peter C. Agre has been elected to succeed McCarthy as president-elect. Agre, a 2003 Nobel laureate, is the director of the Malaria Research Institute in the Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health.

—Becky Ham



James McCarthy

Project Tracks S&T in '08 Presidential Campaign

As the U.S. presidential primary campaigning builds to high intensity across the country this winter, AAAS has launched a new Web site devoted to science and technology issues in the 2008 election.

Science and Technology in the 2008 Presidential Election, at <http://election2008.aaas.org>, highlights five S&T issues to watch in the election year: competitiveness and innovation; education and the workforce; health care; energy and the environment; and homeland security.

The site also features the candidates' positions on the major S&T issues, including relevant news stories and published commentaries; survey information; white papers and other reports from policy organizations; and election calendars.

Although some candidate Web sites feature extensive S&T platforms, these detailed plans have yet to become a key feature in any campaign. During the primary campaign, "the treatment of science-related issues has ranged from superficial to nonexistent," AAAS CEO Alan I. Leshner wrote in a 4 September 2007 op-ed in the *Des Moines Register*.

With a grant from the Richard Lounsbery Foundation, AAAS's Center for Science, Technology, and Congress developed the new site as a resource for voters to explore the candidates' S&T positions, and to provide the research community with a vehicle for informing the candidates on emerging issues. CSTC and its partner in the site, the Association of American Universities (AAU), plan to contact the various presidential campaigns to encourage them to suggest relevant content for the site.

"As science and technology issues become a part of the political debate in 2008, it is important that voters have access to as much information as possible about the candidates and their views," said CSTC Director Joanne Carney. "We hope the project will provide this information, give the candidates access to voters who care about these issues, and engender a much-needed dialogue about science, technology, policy, and politics."

The project is the result of an informal working group composed of representatives from the AAU, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Center for the Study of the Presidency (CSP), National Academies, and other organizations. Meeting last year, the group urged the scientific community to get more involved in political dialogues and encourage the candidates to discuss S&T during their campaigns.

"In previous elections, science issues have been reduced to one or two hot-button items, with no real discussion of how candidates would utilize science in their administration," said AAU President Robert M. Berdahl. "But the

21st century will witness a worldwide competition for scientific and technological mastery, and it is our hope that the site will help voters determine how candidates would meet this challenge."

Carney said the new site was also motivated in part by a study released jointly by CSP and AAAS, prepared as a report to the U.S. president-elect in the fall of 2000. The report, *Advancing*

Innovation: Improving the S&T Advisory Structure and Policy Process, included discussions from a conference by AAAS and CSP on science policy, presidential leadership, the evolution of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, and the importance of congressional support for basic science research. The report eventually became part of a six-volume CSP series delivered to the president-elect that highlighted pressing issues for the coming executive term.

A special News Focus section in the 4 January issue of *Science* profiled the leading Republican and Democratic presidential candidates and their stances on science issues such as global climate change, stem cell research, and innovation.

—Benjamin Somers and Becky Ham



ANNUAL MEETING

Scientists Convene in Boston to Build World Partnerships

"Science knows no country, because knowledge belongs to humanity, and is the torch which illuminates the world."

—Louis Pasteur

Researchers, journalists, and the public can explore the world of science and its influence on the world through interdisciplinary studies and emerging policy issues presented at the 175th AAAS Annual Meeting in Boston next month, "Science and Technology from a Global Perspective."

This year's program includes more than 150 symposia and special lectures on topics ranging from climate change, infectious disease, technology in developing nations, and emerging international collaborations among researchers. Parents, teachers, health educators, and the public are invited 17 February to a special Town Hall on childhood nutrition and obesity trends around the world.

In his invitation to the meeting, AAAS President David Baltimore said the conference will highlight the power of science, technology, and education "to assist less developed segments of world society while also improving cooperation among developed countries and spurring knowledge-driven transformation across scientific disciplines."

The AAAS Annual Meeting Blog will provide extensive coverage from Boston, featuring reports and podcasts from the staff of *Science* and *ScienceNOW*, AAAS's award-winning Science Update radio program, and AAAS's writers, along with links to U.S. and international news coverage of the meeting. For registration and other information about this year's meeting, see www.aaas.org/meetings.



AAAS

Call for Nomination of 2008 AAAS Fellows

AAAS Fellows who are current members of the association are invited to nominate members for election as Fellows. A Fellow is defined as a member "whose efforts on behalf of the advancement of science or its applications are scientifically or socially distinguished." A nomination must be sponsored by three AAAS Fellows, two of whom must have no affiliation with the nominee's institution.

Nominations undergo review by the steering groups of the association's sections (the chair, chair-elect, retiring chair, secretary, and four members-at-large of each section). Each Steering Group reviews only those nominations designated for its section. Names of Fellow nominees who are approved by the steering groups are presented to the AAAS Council for election.

Nominations with complete documentation must be received by 9 May 2008. Nominations received after that date will be held for the following year. The nomination form and a list of current AAAS Fellows can be found at www.aaas.org/aboutaaas/fellows. To request a hard copy of the nomination form, please contact the AAAS Executive Office, 1200 New York Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20005, USA, at 202-326-6635, or at btucker@aaas.org.

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