Climate Extravaganza Bombs

Things did not go well for the White House at last week's conference on the science and economics of global climate change. However, some good, in terms of research support, may yet come out of the meeting.

The much touted conference, the fulfillment of one of President Bush's campaign promises, was clearly intended to demonstrate the President's commitment to the environment and, in particular, his concern about climate change. And the White House pulled out all the stops. They called together environment, energy, and economics ministers from 18 nations. The President addressed the group twice. Treasury Secretary Nicholas Brady opened the meeting. It was cochaired by a trio of the President's top advisers: Michael Boskin, chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers; Michael Deland, chairman of the Council on Environmental Quality; and D. Allan Bromley, the President's science adviser. EPA Administrator William Reilly spoke, as did Energy Secretary James Watkins. Most of the Cabinet was there.

But by lunchtime of the first day, some of the European delegates were fuming. Predictably, many did not like the focus of the meeting, with its emphasis on research and not on actions to stabilize or curb emissions of greenhouse gases, though that emphasis could hardly have come as a surprise.

But what really irked the European delegates, like French environment minister Brice Lalonde, was that they were given no chance to talk at the public session. For the entire morning, one U.S. official after another got up and discussed the scientific and economic uncertainties surrounding global warming and called for greater collaboration on research. Said Lalonde: "We have to just sit and listen. You don't need ministers for that." Still, the format didn't silence the Europeans, who promptly went out into the hall to talk to reporters and then held a series of press conferences to tout their view—namely, that research is fine, even vital, but not at the expense of prompt action.

Perhaps the biggest source of tension was the incongruity of it all—there was the President, the Marine Band, most of the Cabinet, and top officials from around the world talking about . . . research.

As if that were not enough, there then followed a string of embarrassing gaffes. In the working groups, which were closed to the media, the foreign delegates finally got a chance to talk. But just when tensions were abating, a White House aide distributed a "charter of cooperation" that seemed to be intended for the delegates to endorse.

"It looked for a moment like my working group would explode," admits EPA's Reilly. Damage control fell to Reilly and Watkins, who both immediately disavowed the document and retracted it. "It was a glitch in the process, a clear mistake," cochairman Deland told *Science*. "It was a draft statement prepared some time ago that was inadvertently distributed to the delegates. It was not our intent to bring it to a formal vote."

Next, the conference staff left the Soviets off the list of participating nations, which the Soviet delegates construed as a sign of displeasure over their nation's Lithuanian policy.

And then the Sierra Club's Dan Becker got hold of the "talking points," prepared by White House staff to instruct the U.S. delegates on the proper "spin" to put on the meeting, and leaked them to the press. Don't discuss whether the climate has warmed, or by how much, the document warned. "A better approach is to raise the many uncertainties that need to be better understood on this issue."

But at the end of the second day, after some fence-mending on both sides, the delegates did achieve "common ground," said Padraig Flynn, environment minister of Ireland. "Today, as far as we are concerned, we are back on track. Balance is restored," said Laurens Jan Brinkhorst, the European Community's director general for the environment. Much of what brought the Europeans back into the fold, they say, was Bush's closing remarks, which struck a conciliatory tone with remarks like: "We've never considered research a substitute for action." Deland maintains, however, that the U.S. and European delegates were "never as far apart as the public positions would lead you to believe."

Bush offered to host the first session to negotiate a climate convention in the United States, perhaps later this year. And he called for establishing international institutes for scientific and economic research on global change. Bush also called for a "global change data and communications network" that would integrate international computer networks.

In the end it is not clear who out-manipulated whom. The Europeans, some of whom were clearly playing for a Green audience back home, got more press than they might have otherwise. And they do have Bush where they want him, on paper at least, talking about his commitment to action.

■ **LESLIE ROBERTS**

Bush Hails Science at NAS

The Marine Band in full regalia played Hail to the Chief and the members of the National Academy of Sciences rose to applaud President George Bush whose presence was the highlight of the academy's annual meeting. It wasn't what he said so much as that he was willing to drop by. Bush is the first U.S. president to speak at the Academy since Jimmy Carter and is only the fourth to put the Academy on his calendar, the others being Calvin Coolidge in 1924 and John F. Kennedy in 1963.

Bush said all the right things, praising science as "mankind's most exalted mission," and declaring that basic research is "the historical wellspring of this nation's well-being." He spoke about the need for greater "cross-fertilization" between government and the private sector, tipped his hat to international competitiveness, and said he appreciates the importance of math and science education. But he also admitted that his own grasp of the intricacies of research comes not from physics texts but Gary Larsen cartoons. The President especially likes one in which Einstein, after working several calculations, "discovers that time is money."

On a more serious note, the President credited science with a role in the great political awakenings that are changing the dynamics of international relations with such astounding speed. "In the revolution of '89, we have . . . seen communications satellites, along with video cameras, VCRs, and FAX machines, becoming a potent force for peace. . . . Pictures from Poland and South Africa, scenes on the Berlin Wall—the eye of technology has proved more powerful than chisels for breaking down barriers."

The significance of President Bush's speech, many Academy members agreed afterwards, lay less in its content than in the fact that he considered the Academy important enough for a personal appearance. Much credit for that goes to his science adviser, D. Allan Bromley, who appeared with Bush and who took questions after Bush departed for other political vineyards.

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