“BEWARE OF WOLVES ON SHEEP’S CLOTHING”

I am not sure how many of our Rochester Local Section members care about governance on the National ACS level. A lot of members just want to know what is happening locally and do not care about what happens outside of Rochester. However, there are efforts underway to redesign National ACS governance that you may want to pay attention to.

A while ago, the ACS established a Taskforce on Governance Design and this group is taking a serious look as all aspects of National ACS governance, involvement, etc. I personally applaud an effort to look at the governance of the Society as much of it is running as it has since 1876 when it was founded! We have, for instance, a Council that is larger than the Congress of the United States! While most Local Sections, such as Rochester has nominal representation some Local Sections have upwards to 13 to 15 Councilors representing one Section!

There’s now some key governance Committees out working on trying to design new concepts – all working in specific areas. For instance, the Committee on Committees (ConC), on which I serve, is looking to streamline Committees on the National level. The Council Policy Committee (CPC) is looking to streamline Council. And so on it goes.

One area coming up for consideration at the upcoming Boston National Meeting involves a major change to the ACS Constitution and Bylaws, moving key aspects on how Committees work within the ACS to a “working document” that can be changed readily and at any time by the Board of Directors. This is being brought forth as an effort to “loosen the tight constraints on Committees and how they function”. However, being a liaison to two Committees (Science and Membership Affairs) and performing a 5-year review of the Senior Chemists Committee, no Committee has, to my knowledge, complained of such a problem. However, a vote for these major changes could, in fact, allow the Board of Directors to move quickly in dissolving, merging or influencing who can serve on the Committees down the road as they wish – without having to go through a vote by the Councilors who we elect to represent the Members on the National level. It sounds good, but I have seen this before.

There is another effort underfoot to redesign Council. Merely cutting Council could help expedite things and make governance more efficient. However, some major proposals now focus on new District governance to which you might elect your Councilors – and only those Districts would send a limited number of Councilors to the National level. This is a disaster in multiple areas:

1. It takes governance another step beyond the involvement of the grassroots members, and
2. It actually sets up a whole new level of bureaucracy – on the District level.
3. It would expect present Regional Boards to expand beyond Regional Meetings and have to support major governance meetings – with no idea on how they would be financially supported.
What worries me the most is that this seems to be brewing behind closed door by key governance leaders. Fortunately, I am serving as Chair on the ConC Subcommittee on Committee Structure and instead of us making all the calls as to what Committees are doing, I have fought back and stated that we would not move forward without asking the Committees themselves to identify what they do. If we are in charge of such Committees, we owe them the courtesy of hearing form them and working with them. Likewise with CPC, I want them to have the grassroots member be part of a “Re-Imagine ACS” program so we can hear from all of you. What would you do to better serve Local Sections? How would you design the governance of the ACS? What can be done to make the ACS membership more valuable to you? What is the value of Regional Meetings? Do we need two National Meetings a year? How can we get more people onto Committees without having to be Councilors?

I will keep fighting to involve all members in design decisions and ideas moving forward. We all have experienced enough of this in industry and academia, when leaders in their private offices make decisions without the input of those impacted by the decisions.

So, what ACS leadership needs to do now is be up front with the Council and ACS members. Do not look for sales pitches, which sound innocent when you have other plans in place. People want honesty and transparency – and input. This initial proposal around Committees is an example of that “sales pitch” which we need to watch – we cannot afford any proposals being brought forth with unclear intentions – that we may not know until the proposal is passed. Then it is too late and the “wolf comes out from under the sheep’s clothing”.

As your Councilor, I will keep doing my part to keep our Rochester members informed and will continually fight for transparency and a united effort to improve the ACS and how it functions – focused on the future. I will also fight for “leadership by example”, so that if we are cutting costs by impacting local influence on the National scene, then I expect our ACS Board of Directors to also cut their expenses and perhaps even their size. We recently heard of an area of Kodak that had 100 people, 70 workers and 30 Managers. 70 people were laid off. Do you want to guess who the 70 were?

As I have stated previously, I believe it is important for you to know what your Councilors are doing and how they are serving you – the ones who honored us by electing us to the positions we hold.

Please remember that Steve Tajc and I are YOUR voices on the national level and it is important that we hear form you on any ideas, concerns, etc. that you may have. We are there to serve you!

Feel free to contact me at **DCOBB4@rochester.rr.com** or Steve at **stajc3@naz.edu** with any input, ideas or questions.

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