

A PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF THE HENNIKER IV CONFERENCE*

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Every new problem with materials supply evokes discussion but when the problem fades, so does the discussion. Recently, though, people have begun to say, "Let's stop talking and do something before the problem develops. "

This new push for action was recently expressed by Representative Olin Teague and Senator Frank Moss in a joint letter to the fourth Henniker Conference on National Materials Policy. They wrote, "We do wish to impress upon you that materials problems and materials sciences and technology are now infiltrating the collective consciousness of the Congress to a degree that we believe has not heretofore existed."

The Henniker IV conference, August 8-13, 1976, sought to identify and discuss several major materials issues and the various policies and ways to deal with them. The traditional stance of being short on labor and long on materials no longer applies; we need a drastic change in our policy.

The Henniker conference, organized by the Federation of Materials Societies for the Engineering Foundation, met at New England College in Henniker, N.H. Franklin P. Huddle was scheduled to chair the meetings, with Nathan E. Promisel as cochairman. When Frank became ill, John Wachtman took over for him.

Henniker IV looked at national materials policy, in the context of "Engineering Implications of Chronic Materials Scarcity. " Special task forces spent several days discussing separately the following topics: 1. OTA materials assessments for Congress: stresses on the total materials cycle. 2. Government, supplies, and shortages: the work of the National Commission on Supplies and Shortages. 3. Conservation of energy in materials processing. 4. The role of materials in national defense. 5. Utilization of organic renewable resources.

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Value of Henniker Conference to U.S. Congress

The three previous Henniker conferences on National Materials Policy have had strong congressional support, and the results have helped Congress in a variety of ways. The first, in 1970, discussed the topic of "Materials Problems and Issues," and the proceedings were published by the Senate Committee on Public Works which prepared the bill creating the National Commission on Materials Policy, signed into law the following October.

The second Henniker conference, in 1972, was entitled "Resolving Some Selected Issues." Its proceedings were published by the National Commission on Materials Policy. The findings and concerns of this conference were put to use by the 93rd Congress, during the debate of S.3279, a bill to establish a National Commission on Supplies and Shortages. This bill was signed into law on September 30, 1974.

The third Henniker Conference, in 1974, examined various options in implementing a national materials policy. Its aim was to assist the Office of Technology Assessment in developing several assessments requested by Congress. Topics for discussion and analysis at the Conference included "Economic Stockpiling" and "Materials Information Systems." Assessments covering these subjects have since been completed by OTA and have been extensively used by the National Commission on Supplies and Shortages.

Need for a National Materials Strategy

The conference participants this year generally agreed on the need for wise, proper, and prudent use of our natural resources, but asked who should be involved in such determination. The consensus was that both public and private expertise should be included.

Equally important was the consensus that some overall strategy should be developed to insure that the United States has sufficient resources available to maintain the standard of living which most Americans now enjoy. With this in mind, it is interesting to remember what George Eads said during Henniker IV regarding the work of the National Commission on Supplies and Shortages. The Commission staff, he said, largely attributes the 1972-74 petroleum and natural gas shortages to the uncertain and vacillating nature of US. Government policies.

This conclusion was echoed by many people during the conference, among them Al Paladino, chief of the materials program of the Office of Technology Assessment. Dr. Paladino stated that OTA is considering the framework and component elements of a conceptual strategy for systematically reassessing current and alternative U.S. materials policies. Such an analytical framework would recognize what some observers often forget: that a national materials strategy need not intervene directly in the market system; that such action is certainly not a panacea for all problems; and that the most effective policy may be to do nothing and let the market correct itself. On the other hand, the strategy would also recognize that when the market system is not working effectively, it is the responsibility of Government to take whatever action is appropriate to promote the general welfare of the country.

Such a national materials strategy should ideally encompass not just metals and minerals, but all resources, both renewable and nonrenewable. Above all else, the strategy should provide the decision mechanisms for systematically considering each policy within the context of all other interrelated policies, taking into account domestic as well as international factors. This consideration must include, among others, foreign policy, especially economic policy; environmental policy; food policy; labor policy, and tax policy,

Systematic analysis of the total resource system and its component elements is necessary to reconcile such conflicting issues as: 1, Increasing consumption vs. declining capacity expansion. 2. The need for market initiative and creativity vs. growing Government regulations. 3. The desire to maintain the U.S. standard of living vs. the growing interest of the less developed countries for the larger share of the world's wealth. 4, The jurisdictional responsibilities of many current decision mechanisms vs. the international nature of the resource problems, 5, U.S. self-sufficiency vs. the interdependent nature of the world economy.

Partnership for Mutual Benefit

The OPEC embargo taught us that materials technology, like creativity, cannot be turned on and off like a faucet, and that dollars do not always produce good ideas. At Henniker we heard repeatedly that what this country needs is a partnership of public and private sectors, of experts and laymen, working together for their mutual benefit,

To this end, we agree with Frank Huddle that both “. . . the future generations of Americans whose needs ought to be voiced today and the citizens of the world, our fellow passengers on spaceship Earth, whose views and attitudes transcend national boundaries in the effort to achieve wise, effective management of our total global pattern of resources” ought to be represented in our resource planning.