# TIMING AND THE WORK OF THE STRATTON COMMISSION

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The task of the Commission on Marine Science, Engineering, and Resources was to formulate and advance "an overall plan for an adequate national oceanographic program that will meet the present and future national needs." The Commission's attention and energy necessarily were focused on the substance of its task. Staff was employed to support Commission activity, to help ensure accomplishment of its mission, and to assist the Commission in navigating the unfamiliar terrain of Washington bureaucracy and politics.

It should be emphasized that the Commission was a true working commission. The members were themselves informed and committed. The Commission members themselves prepared the lion's share of the text, which made up the seven panel reports. Staff assisted with the establishing of a database and the logistics of the panel process, in distilling the masses of material, and in preparing the summary Commission report. But the product was clearly that of the fifteen commissioners who were the signatories to the final document.

***Profile of the Commission Staff***

The Commission report lists the names of 25 professional, and 10 support, staff. Each of these individuals did meaningfully contribute to the effort. However, the majority of the group served for a relatively brief period. I would estimate over the two-year period, the average complement was in the range of 12-15 professionals, and 4-5 support personnel. Of this number, only about half were paid from the Commission's $1.5 million appropriation. The remainder were on loan from other federal agencies or (for four of the group for about six months) a foundation that had been organized by one of the Commission members.

The staff reflected a diversity of skills and interests. Most were drawn from middle management levels in their organizations. In assembling the staff, the chief criteria were availability, flexibility, and an aptitude for intensive, high pressure work. For a group assembled quickly in such an ad hoc manner, the staff worked surprisingly well together and I think succeeded in meeting the expectations and needs of the Commission members.

***Timetable for the Commission's Work.***

In retrospect, the timetable for the Stratton Commission's activity appears quite compact and efficient - only 30 months from the approval of authorizing legislation to presentation of a comprehensive, actionable report. At the time, we felt challenged to stay ahead of the rush of events, to be able to produce something at once thoughtful, timely, and relevant to the circumstances of a rapidly changing technical and political environment.

A 30 month time line is about what one must plan for a job of this magnitude. In rough terms, here is how the time related to COMSER's activity was used:

- Six months (7/1/66-1/3/67) to select and appoint the Commission members. This is an absolutely key element of the process. The identification and recruitment of a chair, establishing the advisory relationships between the commission and its congressional and administration advisers, and achieving the desired skills, stature, and breadth of interests among the commission members are major tasks and crucial to success.

- Three to four months to 'get organized'. Simply getting on the calendars of busy people to establish a schedule of meetings can be daunting. Additionally, one must recruit a staff, establish an office, bring in phones and all the attendant paraphernalia etc. This period also includes the 'getting to know each other' process among the Commission members. In the

case of the Stratton Commission, it climaxed (as I recall it) in May, with decisions as to the role and memberships of the several panels.

• Six to eight months of substantive research. For the Stratton Commission, the time lines achieved by the several panels varied considerably, as did their methods for surveying their fields of interest and gaining public input. Most had pretty well staked out their points of view by December 1967.

• Three to four months for documentation and distillation of panel reports. Again, a task which varied substantially amongst the panels, but for which time must be recognized if the product of panel and supporting staff, and contract work is to be brought to a standard which permits its publication.

• Three to four months to integrate all of the special viewpoints, interests, and other baggage which may be carried by participants in the process into some kind of coherent whole. The Stratton Commission did not really 'belly up' to this task until spring of 1968. It required several, two day meetings to talk through the major issues, and determine the overall focus and approach that the Commission wished to adopt in its report.

• Three to four months to validate and refine the proposed program, get it properly organized and written.

• Another month to actually achieve publication, along with all the logistics of finding appropriate illustrations, preparing appropriate transmittals and acknowledgments.

***Presentation of the Commission Report***

A central concern of the Commission, almost from get-go, was the question of when, and hence to whom, it could most effectively and appropriately render its report. It was obvious that a report made in July 1968, as called for in the authorizing legislation, would 'hit the streets' just as the nation's political leadership was preparing for the fall presidential and congressional elections. Better either to defer to the end of the current presidential term or to seek permission to make the report early in the succeeding term of office. I do not recall the exact mechanisms for decision on this matter (or have the papers at home to permit me to research it).

My recollection is that Dr. Stratton concluded that a December 1968 or January 1969 report would best reconcile his obligation to the current administration with a chance to capture the attention of the next. We consulted on this matter with the Commission's congressional advisors, emphasized our mutual desire to keep the report and its recommendations unentangled with party politics yet to find a place in the stream of political action. The congressmen of both parties endorsed delivery of the report to the outgoing administration and promised that they would seek to ensure that it not achieve a 'dead letter' status as a result. At the time, we had no way of knowing that the actual delivery would be to a vice president who had only about a week of remaining tenure in office, or that Hubert Humphrey, who had chaired the Marine Science Council and championed ocean causes, would be the democratic presidential candidate in the 1968 election.

***Administrative Environment for a Stratton II***

The timing issues which complicated the work of the 1967-69 Commission are likely to be even more difficult for a commission formed during the remaining years of a Clinton presidency. This in part reflects the nature of the times. Although the country is not today overwhelmed by the tumultuous issues that intruded into all aspects of national life in the later Johnson years, it is seemingly preoccupied with multiple layers of political trivia which make any governmental venture tortuous and unpredictable. Also, there have been a plethora of legislation and regulation enacted in the 30-year interval, which will complicate both selection of commissioners, and of the staff to be mobilized in their support.

The press can be expected to more aggressively probe any possible suspicion of conflicts of interest, and the executive and congressional branches can be expected to be less accommodating to one another's interests than applied only 30 years ago. Unfortunately these new circumstances could conspire to undermine the possibility for the unanimity which was achieved by the Stratton Commission and which was an important element in the recognition which its report received.

***Lessons Learned - What Lessons May We Draw from this Experience?***

- Not to underestimate the time the job will take.

- Need to recognize that the landscape will likely change significantly and unpredictably as the new Commission moves through its process. Forbearance, flexibility, and on-going communication with those who ultimately will receive, and need to deal with, the product of the Commissions work are essential.

- The most important elements of the activity surrounding the Commission may be those which precede its appointment, and those which follow the completion of its official task. In particular, if you expect to make an impact, there must be follow-through.

- Then, most importantly, remembering that documents do not decide things, people do. People must be energized through a continuing effort to see that the subjects of the Commission's work remains on the agenda and that its recommendations are given serious attention in both the Executive Branch and Congress.