

Scene-setting message to the class

FROM: Joint Forward Engagement Committee
TO: STAFF: HACFE

On -----May, 2005, this Committee received a report entitled _____, submitted by the Blue Ribbon Panel on Forward Engagement. This report responded in full to the Joint Forward Engagement Committee's mandate, as laid out in its letter of _____ to the Panel (letter attached, final Panel report available on internet). The Committee thanks the members of the Panel for their work, and in particular for their willingness to continue on into the next phase of this work.

We believe that the Blue Ribbon Panel's findings should be further developed, as a step preceding implementation on a trial basis. We are calling upon the Panel to make two further advances: first, to improve the consistency and "forwardness" of the so-called Future Contingencies of Interest; and second, to prepare draft legislation embodying the Panel's May recommendations for institutional innovations in the Congress, as may be modified by the Panel during its work over the next several months.

As regards FCIs, the Committee has read and been greatly impressed by earlier work from the Panel and its predecessors. We have, however, noted an unevenness in the degree to which the FCIs push into the future, and in the degree to which the FCIs might be responsible for major and even discontinuous changes in the circumstances of the United States and its citizens. We recognize that this is in large part the result of the inherent difficulty of the task of penetrating at any distance into the realm of major future contingencies.

We would be prepared to accept these shortfalls as inevitable, except for one development of considerable interest to us, and we believe to the Panel members: work that has been underway at the National Science Foundation, on ultra-long range contingencies of potentially profound consequence, having to do with the economics, social, political, security, and even evolutionary consequences of converging advances in nano-technology, biotechnology, information technology and cognitive science. We therefore request that in the first period of this new phase of work, the Blue Ribbon Panel address the implications of these NSF works for the Panel's earlier conception of FCIs that meet the following criteria:

- Arguably of major potential importance for the citizens of the United States and for their government;
- Sufficiently far into the future so as to currently be at the fringe of attention at the most senior levels of policy-making in government.
- Already sufficiently manifest so as to justify least preliminary action in the present, rather than postponement of action.
- Covering all domains of national life, including major domestic as well as international concerns.

- Presented to the maximum extent possible in the form of neutrally phrased issues for Congressional consideration as input to the legislative agenda.

As regards our request for a legislative proposal, the Committee is asking the Panel to render its recommendations into an illustrative draft bill that would provide the necessary enabling authority to permit establishment of the proposed Congressional Forward Engagement Process, as proposed by the Panel in its May 2005 report, with such changes as the Panel may now decide are necessary. An annex reporting on such instances should be appended to the Staff's main report. In substantive terms, the staff's report should outline for members how the Forward Engagement cycle is to operate, and what role members will be playing as the cycle proceeds. The staff should transmit its findings regarding more advanced FCIs and its draft legislation, in time for a briefing of the full Committee, to take place on or about -----.

Salutation.