

Daniel Greenberg of Science & Gov't Report newsletter suggests it may have more combatants than now appears. Because milk is a surplus commodity in America & Europe, here we have a scientific wonder... for which there may be no need.

This raises a lingering & larger issue: because something is technologically possible, must society allow it to happen? Greenberg calls BST a "purposeless scientific advance." This issue can provide the platform for examining several "advances" various interests feel are harmful. It could be Pandora's box for science.

#### ITEMS OF INTEREST TO PRACTITIONERS

¶ Last Week's Tragic Earthquake In California calls to mind the "Beat The Quake" campaign, conducted by the Governor's Office of Emergency Svcs (prr 4/24). Was the program instrumental in mobilizing public to prepare ahead of time for disaster? Did it help people avoid panic, think clearly & take safety measures? It's too early to tell (and too sensitive a subject to try to follow up now). But this is noteworthy: reporters on the scene were struck by the calmness of the people; everyone pitched in. Without hysteria, crowds reportedly emptied out of stadiums, airports in an orderly fashion. More later, to see whether mass behavior projects like this work.

¶ Perhaps the Major Food & Agricultural Issue, directly related to pr concerns, is topic of upcoming public hearings. As part of its review of food labelling requirements, FDA is holding series of meetings around the country on labelling & related issues, e.g. standards, health messages. Written comments should be sent to Dockets Management Branch (HFA-305), Docket No. 89N-0226CA, Food & Drug Admin, Rm 4-62, 5600 Fishers Lane, Rockville Md 20857. Or, for copy of dates & locations of hearings, call prr.

¶ Remember "Don't Mess With Texas," the successful clean-up campaign that brightened the highways of the Lone Star State (prr 9/26/88)? Now North Carolina is trying to implement an "Adopt A Highway" program. Trouble is, the Ku Klux Klan wants to be in charge. A lot of locals aren't thrilled, wondering just what they plan to clean up. Maybe their reputation thru public service -- but how do you respond when the bad guys say they want to be good guys?

#### WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

HONORED. By Chicago PRSA, counselor Philip Lesly, for lifetime of service to the profession; & Norman Ross, former vp comm affairs First Nat'l Bank, for community contributions.

Richard Manning, vp San Diego Gas & Electric, as PR Prof'l of the Year by San Diego Press Club.

GOING SOLO. Former NSPRA pres Bill Banach, leading strategist of school pr, leaves Macomb County Intermediate School District (Mich) to start educ'l mktg & research firm.

DIED. Jim Porterfield, former exec vp of Carl Byoir. One of the 1st accredited practitioners, he served as Counselor's Academy chrm in '77.

#### RADIO TALK SHOW HOSTS: DO THEY FORM PUBLIC OPINION OR JUST PROVIDE A FORUM? RECENT ISSUES MAKE IT SEEM THEY HAVE BIG CLOUT TO GO WITH THEIR BIG MOUTHS

Are they deejays or journalists? Do they mold public attitudes or simply allow citizens to be heard? More important still -- do they create the issues? Radio talk show hosts are gaining celebrity, and critics are worried that their biases are shaping public policy.

**Congressional Pay Raise** According to California Journal, it was a winner until guys like WXYT's Ray Fox (Detroit) got involved. One of his callers suggested protesters send tea bags to Congress, reminiscent of Boston Tea Party. Idea was transmitted across a nat'l network of talk shows, soon tea bags littered Capitol steps -- & raise was voted down. "I fault the talk show hosts for stirring up the public," says a Congressional aide. "Compared to what they make, the increase was a pittance." Adds columnist David Broder: "By knuckling under to the nothing demagoguery of their hometown radio talk show hosts, 90% of the senators & reps demonstrated again they put the safety of their seats far ahead of the well-being of the Congress in which they serve."

**Other Cases** 1. Jerry Williams, WRKO Boston, harassed Michael Dukakis so badly that the governor went on another talk show to defend himself. Some blamed him for foiling the Duke's presidential campaign by turning his own state's people against him.

2. If that's an exaggerated claim, Williams was definitely influential in the repeal of Massachusetts' seatbelt law. He accused auto companies of pushing for the bill so they could cheap out of airbags.

3. When actor/Malibu mayor Martin Sheen proclaimed his city a "haven for homeless," NY talk host Rush Limbaugh offered to charter buses for the indigent & send them there. Listeners pledged contributions to the charter. Sheen's chamber of commerce got upset; he was uncomfortable.

Talk shows are a personal medium. You can join the conversation by picking up your phone. They show again the trend toward participative communication, away from one-message-fits-all mass communication. Will wider audiences lift them above their lowest common denominator, populist approach -- or will hosts always do anything to attract attention, especially at rating time? Would they be as powerful if victims didn't react?

4. A Knoxville deejay was the catalyst who exercised citizens to defend historic Baker-Peters house (pr 4/10), about to be razed by Phillips Petroleum. "We were flooded by calls... letters, protests," dpr Dan Harrison told prr. Phillips worked out a compromise when it realized extent of public concern.

**Changing Demographics Of Listening Audience** Talkshows are gaining popularity partly because audiences have changed. Once retirees & housewives, listeners are now a cross-section of the public. Economy has people working alternate shifts. Some dads are staying home. And, as California Journal points out, gridlocked highways & long commutes spur radio listening, cellular phones allow call-ins from cars.

**Age-Old Phenomenon** The radio talk show is a tech-age version of the forums of ancient Greece or town meetings of early America. But unlike open-air marketplaces or come-all colonial conclaves, radio talkwaves are controlled by the host. Callers don't always get thru, can easily be scapegoated. Williams is known for insulting callers by calling them "jerks" & telling them they're "full of bull." Who can argue? With the power to disconnect, the host always has the last word.

**Williams:** "We're like politicians without having to run. We're troublemakers... a good muckraker is necessary, particularly muckrakers who are in touch with everyday folks. We've never had any respect. All of a sudden we're getting some visibility... it was about time for us to come together and talk about what we could do together."

**Radio Talk-Show Host Ass'n Formed** At June conference in Boston, hosts nationwide pooled concerns, discussed phenomenon of their new popularity. They decided to form an ass'n -- to the dismay of the FCC. "Local deejays are using serious nat'l issues for audience building," says commissioner James Quello. And Capitol Cities/ABC prohibited its hosts from attending, fearing meeting would be interpreted as a "power lunch."

**TALK SHOW HOSTS, LISTEN TO WICI: WHEN IT COMES TO VOICING OPINION, JOURNALISTS SHOULD REMAIN MUM** "When you assume the role of journalist, you give up your personal right to public opinion," newspaper publisher Nancy Monaghan, ex-USA

Today ed, told prr. "No journalist can afford public perception of bias... credibility is the journalist's most cherished calling card," she writes in WICI's quarterly, The Professional Communicator.

That means no rallies, no volunteer time, no speaking out, no contributions to causes. And, for practitioners, that means not asking them to serve on your board, host events, chair committees.

Indeed, age-old dictum is objectivity above everything else. But lately, media is accused of distorting

**Monaghan:** "Some people get into journalism for the wrong reasons. They should really be in social work. They think they're going to change the world -- they soon find out they won't."

truth, trying to shape public opinion on everything from the Vietnam war to Israel. ABC producer Av Westin detailed the phenomenon in Newswatch: How TV Decides The News. One bias he exposes: during coverage of anti-abortion activity, reporters & camerapeople focus on Bible-thumping extremists, with whom few would want to identify (pr 1/9). Has objectivity lost out to power? Or the ratings battle? Or entertainment?

Monaghan scoffs at the concept of radio talk show hosts as journalists. "They're commentators, really deejays. I question the propriety of their guiding public opinion -- but I also promote free speech."

**LAWYERS NOT SO DUMB ABOUT PR: OUTREACH PROGRAM EARNS TRUST BY TEACHING LAW 101 TO LAYPEOPLE**

Beverly Hills Bar Ass'n is showing pr savvy by instructing area residents on such topics as: divorce & child custody; protection of the elderly; insurance; leases; wills & trusts. "Everyone must deal with one or more of these issues at some point in life. People really should know the fundamentals," pres Kathryn Ballsun told prr.

Until mid-November, courtrooms will serve as classrooms as local lawyers lecture to residents, who pay \$20 each for entire 6-week series. "The response so far has been fabulous. Our first night was a sell out." Ballsun hopes "Citizens Law School" will be conducted on a semi-annual basis, alternating sites between east & west parts of the city.

Program is part of an ongoing effort to reach out to the community. Bar ass'n also goes into high schools with its "Blue Car" program: lawyers teach kids basics of the legal system using a car as a model. Ballsun says at this point in their lives, a car is something that interests them & holds their attention. This is a program other professions could borrow.

One plus for local lawyers is exposure from participating in program. But Ballsun says that really isn't the motive. "Publicity is not why we're doing this." In fact, the first lecture was on the downside of bringing suit: emotional distress; hassles; expense. "People really ought to think twice. We detail the pros and cons."

**WHO CONTROLS SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY MAY BE AT STAKE IN BST/BGH ISSUE**

Bovine Somatotropin (BST) is a bovine growth hormone (BGH) that induces cows to produce 10-25% more milk. As the first product of genetic engineering to become a public issue, 4 chemical companies producing BST have a huge stake. Particularly since their other ag chemicals -- pesticides, herbicides & similar -- are attacked on environmental & cost-effectiveness grounds.

Many dairy farmers, consumer activists & political strategists foresee disaster. Ice cream maker Ben & Jerry's & several supermarket chains have said they will not handle milk from BST-treated cows. Complicated subject has generated reams of argument in the course of inching toward emerging as a public issue.