

Chairs' Corner – January 2007
Ruckelshaus Center

TO: UW Foundation, Campaign Cabinet, Deans, Development & Alumni Staff
FROM: Orin C. Smith, Chair, UW Foundation
Daniel J. Evans, Vice Chair, UW Foundation
William H. Gates, Campaign Chair

Dear Friends,

Universities have been praised for many things, but only Bill Ruckelshaus, we suspect, has ever described them as places where “you can leave your guns at the door and talk rationally.”

Bill’s long and admirable career has made him all too familiar with the gun-slingers of public controversy. At the Environmental Protection Agency (of which he was the first and fifth director), in the Department of Justice (where he was briefly Deputy Attorney General—remember the Saturday Night Massacre?), at the FBI, as an attorney in Washington D.C. and Seattle, as a Weyerhaeuser executive, and as a leader in efforts to save Northwest salmon and Puget Sound, Bill has had first-hand experience with strident conflict and “the paladins of the adversary approach” (that phrase from a speech he gave a few years back).

Might there be a better approach? “When I was at EPA the second time around,” he’s told us, “there were continuing fights, and it was very hard to find a place just to sit down and talk. So I asked Harvard if they could help, and Bob Reich [later Secretary of Labor] arranged for some sessions there.” The experience was revelatory: “I just found it remarkable how open and non-defensive people are when they get in a university setting.”

So a few years later, when Senator Alan Simpson asked him to help start and then chair an environmental problem-solving institute at the University of Wyoming, Bill agreed. In a state with more than its share of environmental disputes, the institute has been an improbable success. People leave their guns at the door and talk rationally.

To our great good fortune (on many counts), Bill Ruckelshaus eventually moved to the Northwest. The idea of a university-based center for collaborative problem-solving came with him, and about five years ago he approached the University of Washington with that idea. (Full disclosure: two of us, Evans and Gates, were part of that initial conversation and have been closely involved ever since.) The wheels began to turn, and by 2003 the Center was running as a pilot project—the Policy Consensus Center, led by Professor Jon Brock—in the Evans School. WSU soon became a partner, adding essential geographic and intellectual reach for dealing with state-wide problems.

Now it has all come to fruition. Two months ago, at a celebration attended by the governor and both university presidents, the UW and WSU announced their joint launch of the William D. Ruckelshaus Center. Bill Ruckelshaus (who chairs the Center's advisory board) resisted the naming, but, as Governor Gregoire pointed out, his name on the door is the best possible shorthand for the Center's values: "integrity, respect for all, and civil solutions that make life better for all Washingtonians." For Jon Brock, who now co-directs the Center with Rob McDaniel of WSU, the trademark Ruckelshaus blend of high principles and pragmatic common sense is the Center's ongoing inspiration.

So what exactly does such a Center do? You can go to www.RuckelshausCenter.washington.edu for a fuller answer, but here is a look at one effort now under way, the Agricultural Pilots Project.

"Farmers and environmentalists fight all the time," says Brock. "Governor Gregoire asked us if we could bring agricultural and environmental interests together to try to find new farming methods beneficial to the environment." As Brock had done when putting together the Center itself, he and a small team of faculty and students began talking to people statewide—farmers, environmentalists, political and tribal leaders, 150 people all told—to learn the issues and to find out whether the Center would be seen as trustworthy and credible by all sides. Such an assessment is always the critical first step, and for this project WSU's familiarity with agricultural issues and people was indispensable. As with previous projects, the Center's advisory board, painstakingly assembled to be both broadly representative and widely respected, was cited by many people as a key to their signing on: "I can sell this to my people because they'll trust your board."

These wide conversations told Brock the project was worth doing. But they also told him that his initial concept was all wrong. He had imagined that the Center would direct the necessary research. "Instead," he says, "I saw that there are already great ideas out there, and we just needed to get them to bubble up." So the Center invited proposals from people on the ground, and in just 45 days 90 pre-proposals came in. "Many in the agricultural and environmental communities," says the official report, "now seem eager to roll up their sleeves and work together to preserve the heritage and economic value of agriculture and the environment in this state."

An oversight committee at the Center, again with broad representation of all areas and interests, will select proposals and forward them to the state for funding. Faculty from both universities will serve as advisers and help monitor and evaluate the proposals that are actually funded and tried. If all goes well, the Agricultural Pilots Project will bring us new farming methods that are effective, profitable, and environmentally benign.

Perhaps more important, it has already built bridges between communities that have often been at loggerheads. And it has led to the Center's next challenge, again at the governor's request (and in her new budget proposal): trying to find common ground among the parties who were at war in Initiative 933, the property-rights initiative.

Collaborative problem-solving, says Bill Ruckelshaus, is the name of this game. For some big, multi-faceted, intractable problems in an increasingly complex society, such a process holds more promise than legislation or the courts: “You can’t take ’em all to court.” The key ingredients, he believes, are the neutral territory and expertise of a university (or two) and the inclusion, right from the start, of everybody affected by the problem. Then they can lay down their guns and get to work.

In the spirit of peace, good will, and collaborative problem-solving, we wish you all a Happy New Year.

Orin, Dan, and Bill

Looking Back

- As of December 31, 2006, our **total Campaign giving since July 1, 2000, reached \$1,983,146,889** toward our Campaign goal of \$2 billion.
- The December Report of Contributions Notes is attached and contains fundraising details.

Looking Ahead

- **Friday, January 26, 2007**, Foundation Board & Campaign Cabinet Meeting, 8:30 a.m. coffee; 9:00-11:00 a.m. meeting, Safeco Auditorium.
- **Friday, April 27, 2007**, Foundation Board & Campaign Cabinet Meeting, 8:30 a.m. coffee; 9:00-11:00 a.m. meeting. Washington Weekend April 26-28, 2007.
- **Friday, September 7, 2007**, Foundation Board & Campaign Cabinet Meeting, 8:00 a.m. coffee, 8:30-11:30 a.m. meeting.
- **Friday, September 7, 2007**, Sixth Annual Recognition Gala, Suzzallo Library.