THE ORIGINS OF THE STRATTON COMMISSION

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The Stratton Commission report of January, 1969 was the culmination of an effort that began almost exactly ten years earlier with the February, 1959 publication of the NASCO report, *Oceanography 1960-1970*. NASCO was the 10 member National Academy of Science's Committee on Oceanography, chaired by the Cal Tech geochemist Harrison Brown whose members included Maurice Ewing, Columbus Iselin and Roger Revelle, the directors of the three major oceanographic institutions, Lamont, Woods Hole and Scripps.

The timing was propitious. NASCO was formed in November, 1957, one month after the launch of the first Russian satellite, which served as a wake-up call for the need for a more aggressive US science policy and the needs of US science. President Eisenhower established the position of President's Science Adviser and appointed MIT president, James R. Killian to the post. The NSF budget doubled in two years.

However, even in propitious times Academy reports can gather dust. Harrison Brown and his colleagues, presumably with the blessing of NAS president Detlev Bronk, took its report to Congress. They were well received. Members of Congress and their staffs were flown by the Navy to Lubec, Maine for the annual summer meeting of NASCO at the welcoming home of its most astute political member, Sumner Pike, a banker and former member of the Atomic Energy Commission.

Ed Wenk, whose book *The Politics of the Ocean* covers this period, describes in some detail the effect of the NASCO report. Regular calls were made on Capitol Hill by Brown and other NASCO members. Hearings were held and resolutions on the importance of oceanography were passed with near unanimity. Next came legislation. One authorized the Coast and Geodetic Survey to conduct activities beyond the narrow coastal area it had been limited to for the first century of its existence. Another gave the Coast Guard explicit authority to conduct oceanographic research.

And in due time both the House and the Senate took up the question of how the Administration was organized to meet the challenges of the NASCO report. Whether in response to NASCO, or as part of the general upgrading of science after Sputnik, the Eisenhower Administration had taken its informal, but effective, Coordinating Committee on Oceanography and renamed it the Intergovernmental Committee on Oceanography (ICO), upgraded the level of the membership, and formalized its status under the new (Sputnik generated) Federal Council for Science and Technology (FCST). Membership was now at the level of the heads of the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries and the Coast and Geodetic Survey and Assistant Secretary of Navy for R and D. Effective as the new ICO might be, it did not satisfy the new ocean buffs in Congress.

However, Congress had difficulty at first in deciding what they did want, and the Administration (Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson), as might be expected, was not enthusiastic about Congress telling it how to organize itself. After some false starts, the Senate led by Washington's Warren Magnuson, chair of the Commerce Committee, decided what was needed was a high level Council consisting of the Secretaries and heads of those departments and independent agencies with significant ocean responsibilities. The House (in part, at least, because of concern that the Administration might veto such a bill because it told the Administration how it should get its act together) pushed for an independent commission to review the situation and report back to the President and Congress.

Neither was prepared to give, and in due time, of course, we got both. In June of 1966 Congress passed,

and President Johnson signed, PL 89-54, the Marine Resources and Engineering Development Act, establishing the cabinet-level National Council on Marine Resources and Engineering Development chaired by the Vice President and the Commission on Marine Science, Engineering and Resources, the latter to be forever known after its chair, Jay Stratton, former president of MIT and, at that time, chairman of the Ford Foundation. Included in the compromise was the agreement that the Council would go out of business 120 days after the Commission submitted its report to the President and to Congress. Implicit in the legislation was the assumption that if the Commission thought that the Cabinet-level council was the preferred way to organize marine affairs within the administration, and so recommended, Congress would then pass legislation making the Council permanent.

As might be guessed, there was not much enthusiasm within the various parts of government for this legislation. Apparently, there were no supporters within the administration, and the Navy, in particular, was very much opposed. Wenk relates the following anecdote, which he was able to verify, for at least one reason President Johnson signed rather than vetoed the bill. He and Magnuson had been close colleagues in the Senate, and Johnson had been best man at the Magnuson wedding. While the bill was sitting on the President's desk, Mrs. Magnuson queried the President at a White House reception as to whether he would scuttle a bill that her husband had worked so hard on, to which the President is reported to have replied, "Honey, for you I'll sign it."

In the seven years since the submission of the original NASCO report Congress had expanded its vision. The NASCO report, of course, was about oceanography, however, broadly that term may be defined, and Public Law 89-54 places heavy emphasis on marine science, but the mandate of both Council and Commission included not only oceanography, but marine resources and engineering and the management of those resources. Most importantly, the Commission was given the politically charged task, "Recommend a Governmental organization plan with estimated cost."

It was Jay Stratton's genius that insisted that NASCO not take up that issue until we had broadly reviewed the field of marine affairs and the government's role. The military use of the ocean was not part of the Commission's mandate and the Commission made a conscious decision to ignore marine transportation, even more a political morass then than now. With those exceptions the Commission interpreted its charge broadly, as can be seen in the forward to its report, *Our Nation and the Sea*;

> "First, the Commission was asked to examine the Nation's stake in the development, utilization, and preservation of our marine environment.
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> "Second, we were to review all current and contemplated marine activities and to assess their adequacy to achieve the national goals set forth in the act.
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> "Third, on the basis of its studies and assessment, the Commission was to formulate a comprehensive, long-term, national program for marine affairs designed to meet present and future national needs in the most effective possible manner.
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> "And finally, we were requested to recommend a plan of Government organization best adapted to the support of the program and its expected costs."

The Commission recommended the formation of NOAA as an independent agency. NOAA, of course, was established, but not as an independent agency, nor did it contain all of the pieces recommended by the Stratton Commission. The Coast Guard remained in the newly formed Department of Transportation.

The birth of NOAA did not come easily. Just as many reports from the National Academy gather dust, the recommendations of many Presidential Commissions are ignored. The Stratton Commission report faced an additional challenge. The report was the product of a commission appointed by a Democratic president, but it was left to his Republican successor to implement.

What saved the Commission's recommendations for a NOAA was Congress. There appeared to be no particular enthusiasm for the recommendations within the new Nixon administration, but the ocean partisans of both parties in both the House and the Senate kept up the clamor. And they picked up additional advocates, including Representative George Bush from Texas and a relatively junior senator from North Carolina, Fritz Hollings. The latter is widely believed

to be responsible for getting the report a respectful hearing within the White House.

Does this history have any lessons for today? Perhaps. First, the gestation period for the Stratton Commission was long. It began with the NASCO report of 1959, and it rode a wave of enthusiasm for support of science generated by Sputnik and a true awakening of interest in ocean matters by a group of dedicated members of both the House and the Senate. The Stratton Commission was fortunate in its leadership, and it was lucky. Its recommendations were pushed by a relatively small group of members from both parties and both houses of Congress who ultimately prevailed.