

Notes for NAL Meeting
Thursday, January 15, 2014
1:30 pm

Meeting attendees: Jim Beggs, Harry Finger, Fred Gregory, Wayne Hale, Norm Chaffee, Al Koller, Bob Sieck, Bob Crippen, Chet Vaughan, Roy Harris, Arnie Aldrich, Ray Colladay, Rich Christiansen, Ron Browning, Jeff Bingham, Courtney Stadd, Chris Christensen, Mal Peterson

NAL AND THE CHAPTERS

Mal Peterson opened the meeting by announcing that Fred Gregory and Wayne Hale have agreed to become Chairman and President, respectively. He noted that the League owed Jim Beggs and Harry Finger much gratitude for their leadership of NAL and that they will continue to have emeritus status on the Board.

Mal then turned to the issue of how NAL can best communicate with the various local chapters. He noted that Al Koller (Florida Chapter) and Norm Chaffee (JSC Chapter) were participating via phone. Mal said that he was hopeful that NAL's communications could be connected to all the chapter members. The question was whether NAL communications should go directly to the chapter members or indirectly via the Chapter leadership?

Norm Chaffee stated a strong preference for NAL communications to go via the Chapters due to the membership turnover, renewal challenges, etc. As a result, the local chapter leadership has the best handle on the status of membership contact information. Al Koller agreed that working through the Chapters was best.

Fred Gregory asked whether one can safely assume that all League members are no longer active NASA employees. Norm said that, yes, that all of his Chapter members are fully retired. Mal noted that some have been brought back in a consulting capacity and paid for their specific expertise. But if one is hired full time by NASA one cannot be a member – as stipulated by the by-laws. Fred said that presumably this does not include those who are members of an advisory panel and paid on a per diem basis.

Fred said it would be good if the NAL had a broader reach, such as more chapters at other centers. Mal noted that he had talked to the leadership of the Langley, Ames, and Goddard alumni groups. These groups gather together for social occasions (e.g., luncheons) on a regular basis, but do not collect dues. The Goddard Retiree and Alumni Association (GRAA) has speakers at its luncheons, most often from GSFC managers or leadership on topics of interest. From what Mal could learn, the Marshall Employees Association has both retirees and active employees and do not have a separate association for retirees. Chet Vaughan said there was a separate Marshall alumni group in the past, and that they had pulled out of the NAL in the late 1990s due to disagreement with the HQ League over how much of the annual dues would be retained to run the NAL HQ office and how much would be returned to the chapters to fund their operations. With

regard to other centers: Chris Christensen said to his knowledge Glenn alumni did not have an organized association. Although there had been an NAL chapter at Stennis until recent years, it had disbanded; there is some interest among Stennis alumni to reactivate it. And, in December 2013, the JPL alumni group had disbanded.

Mal noted that he had talked to Ron Browning (NAL Board member and President of the GRAA) and Christine Darden (President of the Langley association) about becoming non-dues-paying affiliates and having links to their websites on the NALHQ.org (also NALHQ.com) website. Ron Browning said GRAA would have no objection to being a link on the website.

Mal indicated that a priority on the “to do list” is to pursue formal affiliate relationships with the Chapters including hyperlinking to the various Chapter web sites.

Norm asked if NAL National HQ has a current list of dues paying members. Mal replied that there were many members on the list that were not current in their dues, most likely due to dues renewal notifications not being sent out, a fallout from the closure of the NAL office in DC after former Executive Director Jerry Rosenberg had his stroke in early 2013. He noted that he was all ready to send out a letter to all members on his list to ask them to renew their membership, pay their dues and provide updated contact information.

It was noted that NAL HQ used to publish a directory with member contact information. Mal replied that NAL no longer has the same level of resources to put out such a directory and that “we will have to rely on distributing information via the web site.”

Fred Gregory initiated a brief discussion regarding an article he’d read that a significant number of people do not use e-mail. Several attendees chimed in that some people prefer not to disclose their e-mail addresses. Ron Browning noted that only 800 out of 2500 GRAA members got their newsletters via email; the balance got the newsletters mailed to them

Fred stated that he preferred that communications come to Mal for distribution. Mal will continue to send out communications -- via email, the website, and by letter -- until he can enlist someone else to help or take over. He also said that he needs someone with requisite expertise to assist with developing a collaborative sharing capability for the website, in order to allow members to collaborate on drafting position papers and sharing their opinions in a non-public part of the website.

RECONSTITUTING THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Mal then went on to discuss the make-up of the Board of Directors. There are currently five *ex officio* positions: Chairman, President, Executive Director, and the two Chapter Presidents. He noted that the BOD was quite large in the past and had not been updated. In fact, five or six members from the current list of directors—which dates from the 1990’s-- have passed away.

The strategy in formulating a new Board is to have the members represent expertise in key areas including space flight (e.g., Arnie Aldridge), space science, aeronautics and technology (e.g., Ray Colladay), program management, and institutional knowledge. People in each of these areas can assist in developing papers that will provide guidance to the Chairman and President in discussions with NASA, OMB, Congress, the media and the public.

Jeff Bingham, until recently the ranking staff member on the Senate authorization committee, talked about how the NAL could prove to be useful to the Congressional staff and members by providing them insights into the back history on NASA programs and institutions.

Mal also mentioned his interest in inviting Tom Young and Ed Frankle to serve on the Board. The former is a long-time member of the Board and would be invited to stay. Concerning the latter, he said that the Board needed a member who could provide legal advice.

Al Koller said he was puzzled that his name was on the list of directors, given that he was never asked to be on the Board. Mal responded that Al was a board member by the fact that he was a Chapter President – as stipulated by the by-laws. Norm Chaffee said the by-laws stipulate a maximum of 12 directors, and the by-laws hadn't been updated to accommodate the thirty-plus directors on the previous Board, a number that does not include *ex officio* members. The new proposed number of directors also exceeds the number stated in the by-laws. Mal said that he will send out an updated list of directors to everyone once he has completed talking with the few candidates that he has yet to connect with. He also encouraged those participating in this meeting to provide inputs if they have candidates they wish to propose.

NAL, CHAPTERS AND NASA

Mal then went on to discuss the issue of the appropriate attitude that NAL should take toward NASA. He noted that the original charter called for NAL to be “supportive when appropriate, critical when necessary.” Thus, we should provide feedback regarding those issues where there may be concerns. The latter may arise particularly when budgetary/policy decisions by the Administration/OMB were contrary to NASA leadership's recommendations. A recent case in point is SOFIA, a joint program with the Germans, which the Administration proposed to terminate the U.S. lead role in the program and turn over operational responsibilities to the German space agency. This threatened termination led to dismay by the Germans who had made a major investment, and aroused concerns about other international ventures involving the US in a leadership role. In a similar vein, there may be situations involving international space cooperation where the NAL may want to stake out a different position – e.g., cooperating with the Chinese in space exploration – than has been dictated by the Congress.

Fred Gregory commented that the NAL should not be perceived as “handmaidens” to NASA and must feel empowered to take independent stances as circumstances warrant. Such circumstances may arise where White House political constraints or Congressional politics may make it problematic for the NASA Administrator to openly express certain views on a program. The NAL is free from those constraints.

Fred indicated that he planned to call Administrator Charlie Bolden after this meeting and discuss with him NAL’s plans – including that it may take positions independent from HQ from time to time.

Al Koller pointed out that although the NAL’s leadership might be engaged in such budget and policy decisions, this was not an avenue that his Florida Chapter members wanted to go down. He said that in Florida his chapter focuses on outreach and education with an emphasis on inspiring the next generation of scientists and engineers. He and his colleagues are not interested in engaging with politics on the national level. Ron Browning said that the Goddard association tends to focus purely on local activities such as education and do very little at the national level.

Mal noted that JSC retirees are known to be proactive in engaging the Texas Congressional delegation on matters of interest to JSC. He pointed out, however, that this does not extend to lobbying, a prohibited role for a 501(c) (3), but instead NAL will offer our collective expertise and knowledge to decision-makers. As an example, the near future may feature another discussion about future roles and missions and capabilities of NASA field centers. If that hot topic emerges, the NAL can add its insights to help keep the discussion “informed rather than hysterical.”

Jeff Bingham noted that the Senate Space Subcommittee has a new incoming Chair, Ted Cruz of Texas, and that a NAL viewed as an impartial source of expertise and experience without an apparent axe to grind would likely be viewed as a useful resource by the Committee Members and staff.

It was suggested that NAL must figure out an organizational procedure to “get a consensus of its collective thoughts.”

Norm Chaffee cautioned that it is unlikely that the NAL can easily get to consensus on supporting human exploration missions to the Moon versus Mars or how much of the budget should go to space science versus human space flight. Maybe the formation of a task force would be necessary to explore all the issues and use that information to forge consensus positions. Mal pointed out that when members feel strongly about a given issue, even when there is a lack of consensus on the Board, they can be encouraged to express their views to the political decision-makers as individuals versus as representatives of the NAL.

Jeff Bingham said that NAL would be performing a useful role as a clearing-house function in which we would be providing Congress, for example, different perspectives on a given issue without being perceived as self-serving. Being viewed as a credible

information source is critical. In that vein, he recommended that NAL leadership consider an introductory meeting with Senator Cruz and his staff.

Mal added there are numerous examples where providing independent information could make a useful contribution. For example, in the case of the Space Launch System (SLS), NASA is facing a unique challenge in terms of maintaining safety in the context of a very low launch frequency. NAL can observe that such a low frequency is outside of NASA's historical experience base and launching on 3-4 year intervals therefore is a venture into unfamiliar territory, and the resultant lack of experiences poses greater challenges in being able to fly safely and to mission success.

Jeff added that the Senate recognized that a low flight rate for the SLS could pose serious safety challenges but the decision to lower the rate was driven by the available funding level. This is an example where NAL can help validate the nature of the problem.

BENEFITS OF WEB-BASED TOOLS AND NEED FOR FUNDS

Al Koller stated that his chapter is effective in using its web site to distributing information. The chapter's Facebook page is especially useful and is actually more active than the chapter web site. Likewise, NAL at the national level can make effective use of a web site and Facebook. These web-based tools are a key tool in reaching members and the public-at-large and they cost essentially nothing. Norm echoed these thoughts

Al followed on to say that NAL's web site could be the portal to the other chapter web sites at a minimal investment of resources.

Mal then shifted discussion to the topic of funds. He said that Fred and Wayne, in order to maximize their effectiveness, need to be seen and heard and that in turn involves travel to such events as a Space Congress. However, a separate source of funds beyond dues income needs to be identified to support their travel. He said that he and Courtney Stadd had discussed perhaps approaching high net worth individuals for contributions. Jeff Bingham proposed the possibility of pursuing corporate sponsorships.

Norm Chaffee asked about the level of the National member's dues. Mal said it had been lowered to \$10/year to cover the minimal administrative costs.

Norm described a further need: support of the NASA College Fund of which his chapter has the lead role. The original funding for the fund came in the 1980s from the profits from the sales of the late author James Michener's book, *Space*. About ten years ago, the revenue provided by the fund began to dwindle. Although the Combined Federal Campaign had the scholarship fund listed in its supported charities, this had been discontinued when the CFC decided the fund affected only a few states and thus did not have a material impact. Norm Chaffee said that he will follow-up with Mal and Fred providing more details about the Fund. He is planning on sending out letters encouraging contributions.

NEXT STEPS

Mal said the immediate next steps after this meeting involved distributing the minutes from today's minutes. He encouraged everyone to review them and ensure his views are accurately represented. Additionally, he asked for board members to provide inputs to him as to a preferred going forward strategy for NAL Board meetings and a more detailed communications strategy.

Jeff Bingham asked if the Board members should consider themselves Board members or await an additional process. Mal said to consider yourself elected but that he will send out a more formal notification. Al Koller said that he will hold back endorsing the full slate of Board members until it is confirmed that all proposed members have been contacted and accepted.

Norm Chaffee said that he greatly appreciated Fred Gregory's acceptance of the Chairmanship responsibilities and that it appears the resurrection of the NAL is proceeding in a robust manner.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:50 pm