

RESOURCES

RESOURCES FOR THE FUTURE

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Paul R. Portney

HOW ARE WE DOING?

Former New York Mayor Ed Koch used to walk around the city asking the people he met, “How am I doing?” On occasion he got a more graphic response than he might have preferred, but his strolls provided a direct way of learning what his constituents thought and gave them the sense that they were being heard.

While I’m far from being an elected official, it’s important for me, too, to get feedback on how we at Resources for the Future are doing. But because *Resources* goes out to readers in all 50 states and more than 50 countries, a walk-around strategy like Mayor Koch’s isn’t promising. That’s why I am hoping that you will take time on occasion to let me know what RFF is doing well and, especially, where we need to do better, and how. You can do this by writing to me at the address found on page 1 of each issue or by emailing me at portney@rff.org.

To help you assess our performance, we need to be clear about our mission and objectives. RFF’s mission is to “improve policymaking worldwide on natural resource and environmental issues through objective social science research of the highest caliber.” Our three strategic objectives, accordingly, are: ensure that we are doing the very best and most objective research possible; concentrate that research on the country’s and the world’s most important environmental and natural resource problems; and, finally, communicate the results of our work both clearly and through a variety of means so that it really does inform and elevate the key policy debates.

To be sure, measuring some of what we do is straightforward. For instance, one of my goals as president of RFF has been to grow the size of the research staff. Grow it has, from 27 full-time researchers in 1995 to 43 today. Accordingly, our annual budget has grown from about \$7 million in 1995 to more than \$13 million. Similarly, we can at least partially assess the quality of our research program by tallying articles in peer-reviewed journals, books published, and invitations to participate in scholarly conferences.

Other things are much harder to judge, however, and this is where you can be helpful. For example, you read a lot in the pages of *Resources* about climate change, the ongoing restructuring of the electricity industry, and, increasingly, the environmental and resource problems of the developing world. This reflects our view of the importance of these issues. But how about your views? Are there important problems we seem to be overlooking altogether, or to which we should be devoting more attention? If so, please tell me.

Equally important, are we clearly and effectively communicating the results of our work? This is another important goal of ours and we need to know how we’re doing, particularly through the articles you read in *Resources*. In the same spirit, I encourage you to visit our website at www.rff.org and give me your reactions. Is there useful information there, is it presented in a clear fashion, and is the site user-friendly and easily navigable? Finally, are there things about RFF or the people who work here that you would like to know? By all means, feel free to ask.

So, how are we doing? Please let me know and I’ll happily respond. Thanks, readers!

Paul Portney