



PAUL R. PORTNEY

Making Our Ideas Known to the Broader Community

As you read this, the country is preparing for the quadrennial observance of a critical component of our democracy—the presidential election. By spring, we should have a clear idea of whom the Democrats will nominate to run against President Bush. And, as the months pass, both candidates will begin casting about for initiatives for the next four years.

In that spirit, researchers at Resources for the Future are preparing for the election in their own way, compiling a set of policy proposals and recommendations to be ready for the president shortly after the election. These presentations, which will be brief, three to five-page submissions, will be collected into a book that RFF will publish and release at that time.

By the very nature of what we do at RFF and the methods we use to study the problems and issues we examine, our work is often technical, requiring a specialized vocabulary that is sometimes difficult for even a highly educated audience of non-specialists to understand.

Since I became president of RFF more than eight years ago, one of my principal emphases has been to broaden the impact of our work. RFF researchers have always done world-class academic research that has appeared in renowned economic and academic journals. But we haven't always been successful in making our work known to a general public.

We are getting better at what I call the “translation process.” We have built a communications department that has been active in reaching out to the policy community in Washington, across the country, and even abroad. Indeed, the publication you are reading now is part of our attempt to make the relevance of RFF's prodigious output more accessible to policymakers and others interested in public policy—not only legislators and government administrators in Washington, DC, but also public officials at the state

and local levels. Beyond that, we want to make our ideas known to the broader community of environmental advocates, to the media, and to businessmen and women who can make better informed decisions as a result of our research here at RFF.

This book will be something of a departure for us, but also a continuation of our contribution over the past 50 years to the public dialogue. We pride ourselves on being a detached and objective institution that observes and makes calls without regard to who is playing. This effort will not change that posture. RFF is not becoming an advocate; neither the institution nor the researchers will be lobbying on behalf of their proposals. What is different is that we are asking individual researchers to put their policy recommendations on the table and to draw inferences based on their research and accumulated expertise, to reach what they see as the logical conclusions of their work. We hope that others will discuss these ideas and give them serious consideration.

We don't expect that our publication will hit the best-seller lists—especially since we will be giving it away to the next administration and to other elected officials—but we do hope to inform and educate a broader community and in that way help improve not only the quality of the public debate but the decisions that emerge from it. ■

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