

WHITHER UFOLOGY?

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Prepared for January 19-21, 2002, "Think Tank" sponsored by Fund for UFO Research)

Abstract. In his chapter of the University of Kansas Press book *UFOs and Abductions*, edited by David Jacobs (2000), Don Donderi argues that the scientific establishment is not well equipped to deal with the UFO subject, nor is it the only method or procedure used in our society to establish truth. Other approaches include the methods used by the legal system and by the military intelligence community. Taking his insights as a point of departure, I suggest ways in which they could be translated into a promising new way of calling attention to the serious UFO data. Primarily I suggest the organization of a National Public Fact-Finding Commission made up of prominent Americans who would hear presentations of the data over a period of time, and ultimately issue a report making recommendations. I discuss how such a Commission might be organized, how it would operate, and what it might be able to accomplish. Also, I emphasize that a hypothetical Commission would not be an alternative to (a substitute for) a more thorough scientific study, but instead a way of helping to bring about the application of more and better science to UFOs.

Introduction. Having reviewed the various submissions by attendees, I strongly agree that new initiatives are needed to revitalize scientifically oriented UFO research and investigation. The non-response of the scientific establishment, the news media, and government agencies, as well as the continued lack of or drying up of financial support, leave us in a crisis situation. "We don't get no respect," nor do we receive anything approaching adequate funding for even beginning to deal with the complexities of "the UFO problem." Why should "we" (depends on the meaning of the word "we") when "we" either embrace or passively co-exist with kooks, con-men, and New Age mush-brains. Until we who stand for careful, scientific study of UFOs clearly differentiate ourselves from the unscientific, and sometimes even anti-scientific, elements it seems highly doubtful that we will ever get anywhere. They becloud all attempts at serious, factual discussion of the evidence.

Ongoing good works. To put our meeting in context, I will briefly review some very worthwhile projects currently underway. This meeting certainly is a worthwhile effort to seek new approaches. However, the Fund and the UFO Research Coalition also are engaged in what to me appears to be the most objective,

scientific attempt to capture real-time data on UFO abduction incidents, and publication of various important reports. Bob Bigelow's National Institute for Discovery Science has been aggressively investigating UFO-related incidents, and in the process has utilized not only scientists, but also such people as retired police detectives and former members of the military intelligence community, in keeping with Don Donderi's insights. NARCAP, the pilot-sighting network, potentially is a very important proactive effort to gather real-time data. On another front altogether, the Sign Historical Group (along with some independent investigators) has been exhuming historical documents and records that shed new light on the early history of UFOs. A new initiative is underway to gather signatures for a petition to the United Nations asking for some simple steps to encourage member nations to be open and forthright about UFOs.

Case Book. I strongly endorse Eddie Bullard's proposal for a carefully derived "Case Book" of meticulously investigated cases. This approach was scheduled to be used by the University of Colorado UFO Project, but was never implemented. Once a Case Book is produced, among the many uses that it could be put to would be to actively seek dialogue with members of academic science departments during which the scientists would first be asked to explain the reasons for their (presumed) skepticism, and then exposed to the Case Book and asked to sit down across the table and discuss the Case Book. Similarly, meetings could be sought with editors of major daily newspapers, science editors, or Members of Congress, as appropriate or desirable. By this means the focus would remain where it belongs, on UFO cases rather than on opinion, speculation, exotic propulsion schemes, and the like.

Fact-Finding Commission. In the context of all these ongoing efforts, and new proposals, I envision the formation of a nonpartisan National Public Fact-Finding Commission that would be only one prong of a multi-pronged attack on the problem. (Part of a "full-court press" to the basketball-literate amongst us.) What it could provide is a focal point for public discussion of UFOs as a scientific issue, news coverage because of the caliber of the people involved and possibly also of individual cases that, under the circumstances and presented in a new context, strike a chord that they haven't before, and presumably the Commission meetings would also stir controversy and attempted rebuttals...all fodder for the news media and likely to stir up dormant interest in the subject. Perhaps most important of all, such a Commission could provide a comfortable forum for important witnesses to speak out when they have not felt able to do so in the past for fear of ridicule or job loss.

Elements of the Commission:

- (1) Commissioners (prominent Americans and public figures from various professions, including Government, the judiciary, legal profession, business, politics, science...).
- (2) Counselors (to organize and coordinate all presentations to the Commission, and to vet potential witnesses; candidates for Chief Counsel: Don Donderi; Mike Swords).

(3) Presenters (well-informed and articulate persons who would make presentations of specific or collective evidence and data; e.g., Walter Webb, Jennie Zeidman).

(4) Witnesses (to testify on personal knowledge of specific cases; e.g., Lt. Col. Coyne; Col. Halt; DIA guy re: Iran case; Delbert Newhouse; Joachim P. Kuettner; David R. Saunders; Robert Salas, ICBM site missile officer).

Just to illustrate the concept, the following represent the caliber of the people I envision serving as Commissioners (obviously some of these would be more likely real-life candidates than others):

Madeleine Albright

Howard Baker

Jimmy Carter

William S. Cohen

Michael Collins

Mario Cuomo

Robert Cowan (former science editor, Christian Science Monitor)

Walter Cronkite

Adm. William J. Crowe

Hugh Downs

Gerald Ford

Doris Goodwin

George Mitchell

Bill Moyers

Story Musgrave

Sam Nunn

Jody Powell

Sally Ride

Patricia Schroeder

George Schultz

[Other suggestions are invited]

Operational Procedures

The Commission would meet for something like one year to 18 months, enough time to allow for thorough presentations and discussion of data. Depending on funding available, it might meet every two months or every three months. It would be a quasi-judicial proceeding whereby the panel of Commissioners would listen to presentations of data and study exhibits, question the presenters, and call for any other witnesses they wish who might have a different perspective. Commissioners would not comment on a daily basis unless they wished to do so as individuals. The meetings would be open and public, with a press gallery and seating for interested members of the public. Any exhibits presented in the course of testimony would be available to the public unless the witness required anonymity or there

were other overriding reasons for withholding the information. This is only a broad outline; many specific details would need to be worked out.

Mission Statement

The stated mission of the Commission would be to hear testimony from concerned members of the public in regard to their experiences related to UFO sightings. A major goal would be to clarify the factual evidence as reported by credible witnesses, and to resolve controversy about the ways in which human institutions have dealt with the subject, in the national public interest. Public education would be an important element of it, as would the setting of an example in regard to witnesses receiving a fair hearing without ridicule, and full public reporting of the relevant data. The Commission would not be asked to pass judgment on the "reality" or nature of UFOs. Their final product would be a report on findings and recommendations for public policy in regard to future official handling of UFO reports. What, if anything, should the Government and/or other institutions of society do to ensure adequate investigation, analysis, and full public release of UFO sightings reported by credible observers?

What Would It Accomplish?

If the Commissioners were generally perceived as being fair-minded and respected members of society without regard to political party lines, their very willingness to participate would be newsworthy. As the public proceedings progressed, there would be all sorts of news generated by the sessions. Just picture Jennie Zeidman presenting her findings on the 1973 helicopter-UFO encounter in Ohio, and Lt. Col. Coyle appearing as a witness. Never mind that the cases are "old," the mere fact that a panel of respected Americans was listening to the presentation would generate not only news, but new attention to the UFO subject as, after all, possibly being worthy of another look. The Case Book, NARCAP, NIDS, and other initiatives could be pressing forward on parallel tracks, and in some instances could participate in the work of the Commission.

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