November 2, 2017

**Bridging the Divide: Incorporating Up-to-date Research Findings and Social Shifts into Public Policy**

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Speakers: David Bailey, President and CEO, Genome Alberta; Ronald-Frans Melchers

Professor of Criminology, University of Ottawa; Eric Montpetit, Professor, Political Science Department, Université de Montréal; Bonnie Schmidt, Founder and President, Let’s Talk Science

Moderator: Brenda Brouwer, Vice Provost and Dean, School of Graduate Studies, Queen’s University

**Takeaways and recommendations**

* We are at a tipping point in making the case for science as a driver of economic growth and societal well-being.

**Increase effective communication**

* Scientists need to communicate better with the public to increase the credibility of science, break down barriers/perception of academics as “elite”, and spark innovation.
* Scientists need to evaluate and understand the risks and benefits of speaking out. What is your goal in speaking out, who is the audience you’re trying to reach and how do you effectively communicate with that audience.
* Scientists should be trained to be better communicators in university. Some level of policy knowledge should also be mandatory.
* Common language supports shared understanding, and both policymakers and scientists are responsible for ensuring they use language that is accessible and properly understood by the other party. There are programs that can help with this process and these should be supported.

**Understand the role of scientists in the policy process**

* The expectation of the role that scientists should play in creating policy is often too high; scientific evidence is just one input into the policy process.
* Scientists are not necessarily experts in the policy process and they are not (and should not be) involved in the actual decision-making process.
* Policymakers need to listen to and respect scientists, but ultimately the responsibility for the decision falls on them. They should not blame scientists if a bad decision is made.
* Policymakers and scientists often have little knowledge or understanding of the policy creation processes. Connect the few experts in this area to scientists and policymakers so they can help ensure that science is effectively used to improve policy, and facilitate an understanding of each other’s roles.

**Build a skilled generation**

* There are many existing initiatives that help improve the public’s knowledge of science. These initiatives should focus on building a skilled and science-literate population – not just increasing the number of people who become engineers.
* Young people who are more science literate are more understanding and respectful of science by the time they enter the workforce.
* More policymakers are recognizing the importance of supporting youth STEM programs. Initiatives at the K-12 levels have a stronger impact on the innovation economy than those at the post-secondary level.
* There is no national ministry of education, so it is difficult to talk about education at the national level. Canada 2067 is working to create that vision. This national initiative brings together educators, businesses, governments, community groups, parents and youth to evolve Canada’s education model by enhancing student exposure and access to STEM disciplines across all levels and areas of learning.

**Advice for scientists**

* Although some advice can be given in crucial moments for policy creation, if you want to influence policy over the long-term you need a long-term view – it can be years before any change happens.
* Scientists are not usually experts in creating policy or public services; as such they need to listen to and respect the experience of policymakers.
* Scientists should get more involved in policy-related matters to build their understanding of the language and processes.