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Director of Public Affairs Announces New Directions

During the June 13 Public Affairs Staff (PAS)-sponsored conference for Agency alumni, PAS Director Dennis Boxx outlined several new outreach initiatives the Agency will take in its relations with the media, interest groups, and the general public.

Boxx, a public relations professional for the last 23 years, noted that he plans to look at the Agency's public affairs program in a new way, seeking out new opportunities and new approaches to getting out the Agency story while protecting sources and methods. DCI Deutch has indicated that he wants to be more open with the American public, declassifying where appropriate, in order to build public confidence in and support for the work of the Agency.

Boxx first hopes to improve the public's understanding of the work of the Agency and the Intelligence Community (IC) and the importance of intelligence in the post-Cold War world. The public needs to understand how CIA is changing its structure and management to meet the demands of the 1990s, the role of Congressional oversight, and the need for accountability. The Agency should tell the public about its successes-and failures-in the proper context.

The Agency will also "be more aggressive in setting the record straight when we've been wronged." The Agency is already engaging the media, as evidenced by the DCI's appearance on the McNeil-Lehrer show, his press conference, release of the transcript of a town meeting, and one-on-one meetings with reporters. The DCI will meet with editorial boards of major newspapers and PAS will send letters to the editor to correct the public record. Boxx predicts that there will be more background briefings for reporters to improve the media perspective on the real world of intelligence. In addition to the DCI, key Agency leaders will meet with the media to discuss issues in their fields.

An outreach program will aim to ensure that the Agency is using every venue possible to communicate with the American people and not rely solely on the news media. Boxx plans to put out more success stories about dual use technologies being converted for civilian use, such as the breast cancer imaging innovation and the use of imagery in disaster relief. He is working with Television Production Partners (see What's News edition number 215 of June 8) and other individuals in the television, movie, and entertainment industry. PAS is also working with specialized audiences, such as veterans groups, academics, contractors and businesses, and retired government officials.

Boxx observed that the "days of unquestioned blind support for CIA and the IC are gone. The American people are questioning the role and methods of the IC. However, the American people want to support the IC and will be receptive to hearing us when we speak up. We need to regain their confidence based on good performance and a willingness to talk about it. Because we are at a critical point in the Agency's history, we need to take new approaches to how secrecy will survive in a democracy."
(This is UNCLASSIFIED.)

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For questions please call

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