If you’re like me and the thriller you took on your summer vacation was The 9/11 Report, by the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks in the United States, you may have been pleasantly surprised by one of the report’s key conclusions: observing that favorable opinion of the U.S. has declined worldwide, the commission proposed that engaging in “a struggle of ideas” should be a strategic priority for American policy. The U.S. government must define what the message is, what it stands for, and just as we did in the Cold War, we need to defend our ideals abroad vigorously.

The 9/11 Commission was breathing new life into a form of statecraft that has been marginalized since the Cold War—public diplomacy, and specifically, cultural diplomacy. By calling for expanded cultural programs, including radio and TV broadcasts to Muslim audiences, the commission acknowledged that winning the hearts and minds of antagonized people—especially young people—in the Middle East and elsewhere was crucial to success in the long-term struggle against extremism. The report stressed that “the United States should rebuild the scholarship, exchange, and library programs that reach out to young people and offer them knowledge and hope.”

I know those libraries, having taken my GRE exam at the American Embassy in Budapest, in 1987, before starting graduate school in New York. I also know that for many people in Eastern Europe, Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe were ideologically charged, offered a lifeline of information (and decent pop music).

Cultural diplomacy can help to correct stereotypes, to shape empathy and normalize relations between states. The problem is that our national infrastructure for cultural diplomacy resembles the pot-hole-marked stretches of the Brooklyn Queens Expressway. Today, there is no longer an independent government agency to manage U.S. cultural initiatives abroad (the United States Information Agency was folded into the State Department in 1999). After several false starts and changes in leadership the State Department has yet to clarify its public-diplomacy agenda.

For those of us who grew up behind the Iron Curtain, the Cold War wasn’t only won by free markets or Star Wars. We won it by sharply reduced government programs. The 50 largest American foundations set aside less than one-half of one percent of their grant-making to international arts exchanges.

Nonetheless, an awareness is forming in diplomatic, academic, cultural and philanthropic circles that something has to be done. In April 2005, as American troops were entering Baghdad, Columbia’s National Arts Journalism Program organized a conference on cultural diplomacy. The event was titled “Arts & Minds,” and because of the opportunity, we gathered just days after the looting of the National Museum in Baghdad. Would there have been a worldwide approval for the military operations if there had not been a response about declining Iraq’s cultural treasures as securing its oil fields?

But where there is failure, there is opportunity—and nowhere more so than for universities. Universities are already America’s de facto cultural diplomats. It’s a role they share with the largest U.S. entertainment companies, though with a markedly different impact on America’s image abroad.

Universities are already America’s de facto cultural diplomats. It’s a role they share with the largest U.S. entertainment companies, though with a markedly different impact on America’s image abroad.

Legislative Update

By Ellen S. Smith

Pataki Vetoes State Education Bills, As U.S. Congress Returns to Consider Federal Funding

State Budget

In early August, the New York State Legislature adopted budget for FY 2004 (April 1, 2004-March 31, 2005) that included full funding for the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), Direct Institutional (“Burn-” Day) Aid, Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP), and Technology Entry Programs (STEP/CETP), and Liberty Partnerships Programs as well as approval for a landmark Higher Education Capital Matching Grants Program for public and private colleges.

However, on Aug. 20, Gov. George Pataki handed down 195 vetoes, eliminating the restorations to Direct Aid, HEOP STEP/CETP, and Liberty Partnerships and canceling the new capital matching program. According to the Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities (CICU) and other organizations, it remains to be seen whether the State Legislature will return to it in time before November election. If overrides are considered, it is reported that the restoration is included in a funding ton will be a top priority.

Federal Issues

Congress returned on Sept. 7, 2004, but much action may be delayed. Bills providing annual funding for federal agencies are likely to pass the full House of Representatives (they have passed most already), but the Senate may only consider the bills in Committee until after the election. No one expects a government shutdown, but a lame-duck session after the election or bills funding agencies until mid-January are possible.

The House of Representatives considered its Labor/HHS/APPpro- gram bills in mid-September. Under the House bill, the National Institute of Health (NIH) would receive the Bush administration’s request—not close to the amounts budgeted over the last five years. Student aid programs of interest include a Pell Grant maximum of $4,050 (the same as last year). Graduate education programs JavaS and Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need (GAANN) are funded at current levels, while federal Work Study programs are level-funded as well. TRIO pro- grams such as Upward Bound receive an increase of $10 million or 1.2 percent over last year. Title VI international education programs increase by $4 million or 5.9 percent, restoring last year’s cut in domestic programs; and specifically, cultural diplomacy programs for the Perkins program are eliminated. The Higher Education Act, slated to be reauthorized in 2004 will likely be addressed during the next ses- sion of Congress. The bill, originally authorized in 1965, funds school counseling programs and grants for undergraduate and graduate students. Luckily, its programs continue with a special provision even if the bill is not reauthorized.

By Colin Morris

Do you think Bush will get the White House again? Want to bet on it? Well, you might be inclined to wager may be a more accurate indicator of candidate’s chances than traditional polling. And Steven SouI, associate pro- fessor in the Department of Industrial Engineering and Ope- rations Research, and Michael Sobel, professor of sociology, have developed a theory to support that assertion.

Some real-money futures markets, in which self-selected participants trade shares at prices predictive of elections results, such as the Iowa Electronic Market (IEM), have performed better than polling data, the researchers found. In the summer trade the individual contracts.

The way in which the IEM operates is that a trader can buy a ticket for $1 for a dollar and then unbundle the ticket and trade the individual contracts. What the trader holds after election gets paid out at whatever percentage each candidate gets. This market was estab- lished in 1988, now allows traders to invest up to $500.

One indicator of the differ- ence in which the markets and polls perform in the fluctuation in share prices based on a can- didate’s chances. For instance, after a party’s national conven- tion, a candidate’s popularity often surges in the polls—indicating a greater chance for the candidate’s chances of being elected. Not so in the market. The shares at which the candi- dates are traded rarely change dramat- ically from session to session, in their analysis, Kuo and Sobel explained. “Our theory could be useful for other forecasting pur- poses as well. Along with any other market, there is interest, markets similar to the IEM predict everything from the outcome of Federal Reserve monetary policies to Hollywood movie openings.

For the entire report, go to http://www.columbia.edu/~s75/KuoSobel.pdf

By András Szántó

The University as Cultural Diplomat, by András Szántó

Restoring America’s standing in the world cannot be the work of government alone. By expanding residency programs, training a new generation of cultural diplomats, hosting agenda-setting conferences and inviting more exhibitions and performers from abroad, universi- ties can lead the world toward a collabora- tion of cultural exchanges. A good place to start would be to bring together our contacts and experiences, our academic, cultural, and diplomatic services to expand our role as cultural diplomats. It’s a role we share with the largest U.S. entertainment companies, though with a markedly different impact on America’s image abroad.

Universities are already America’s de facto cultural diplomats. It’s a role they share with the largest U.S. entertainment companies, though with a markedly different impact on America’s image abroad.

Nonetheless, an awareness is forming in diplomatic, academic, cultural and philanthropic circles that something has to be done. In April 2005, as American troops were entering Baghdad, Columbia's National Arts Journalism Program organized a conference on cultural