
STATED MEETING PROGRAM



Tribute to Herman Feshbach and Victor Weisskopf, Past Presidents of the Academy

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Editor's note: The following remarks were presented at the 1868th Stated Meeting, held at the House of the Academy in Cambridge on March 12, 2003. Carl Kaysen's tribute to Herman Feshbach and Victor Weisskopf was followed by Nobel laureate Steven Weinberg's communication, dedicated to these past presidents of the Academy.

Tonight I am honored to pay tribute to two past presidents of our Academy: Victor Weisskopf and Herman Feshbach.

Viki, as his friends knew him, was president of the Academy from 1976 through 1979. Herman was president from 1982 to 1986. Both were theoretical physicists who made very substantial contributions to nuclear physics at the frontier of that science.

Both had long careers at MIT, and both concluded their careers as Institute Professors—MIT's mode of recognizing a handful of its most distinguished faculty. Both were presidents of the American Physical Society, their election registering the esteem in which they were held by their fellow scientists. Both had far-reaching intellectual interests and concerns. Both felt strongly about the internationalism of science and the importance of maintaining it in the face of political conflicts and across the chasms of the cold-war world. As scientists, both felt deeply their responsibility for helping the world understand the consequences of the new weapons they had helped create in the course of the Second World War. They acted on their beliefs and brought their concerns to the programs of this Academy.

As president of the Academy, Viki did many things, including stimulating and organizing several major international meetings on arms control and on other aspects of the interaction of technological choices and social values. He provided guidance for the discussions and planning that led to the creation of the National Humanities Center in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina.

Certainly the most visible accomplishment of Viki's term in office was the construction of this House in which we now meet. He played a central part in the complex negotiations among the donor, Edwin Land; the City of Cambridge; the landlord, Harvard University; and the architects, Kallmann, McKinnell and Wood. The close relationship between Viki and Edwin Land (himself a past president of the Academy) was critical to the successful completion of the project.

Viki also played a major role in planning the program that combined the dedication of the new House and the celebration of the Academy's 200th anniversary, including symposia in a wide range of disciplines, poetry readings, concerts, and exhibits of paintings and sculptures by Fellows. He truly brought both the arts and sciences to life here at the Academy, remaining active until his death in April 2002.



Carl Kaysen (MIT)

Herman Feshbach's term as president featured a number of initiatives that sounded the themes of the internationalism of science and the urgency of scientists' involvement in educating politicians and the public about the necessity and possibility of arms control.

The boldest of these moves was Herman's leadership in encouraging the Academy to assume the National Academy of Science's role as the US member organization of the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) in Vienna. IIASA, a research institute dedicated to examining the "common problems of industrial societies," is staffed primarily by applied mathematicians, statisticians, economists, and other social scientists from the United States Canada, the countries of Western Europe, Russia, Poland, East Germany, and Hungary. The US-Soviet negotiation that led to its creation was initiated in the Johnson administration and completed with the opening of the Institute in 1973. IIASA was conceived as a channel of communication among scientists from the Soviet bloc and the West, with the idea that, among other things, it might be a means of exposing the Soviet bloc participants to Western ideas on economic organization and the efficiencies of markets.

In order to make IIASA something other than a governmental organization, the American negotiators (of whom I was one) proposed that it be an organization composed of national members—in the US and Soviet cases, their respective Academies of Science—and the Soviets accepted this idea.

In 1983, under pressure from the Reagan White House, the National Academy of Sciences withdrew as the US member organization. Herman took up the challenge of keeping the enterprise alive, persuading the Academy's Council to accept the role of member and the responsibility of raising the funds for the US contribution, which had previously come through the government. That arrangement continued until this year. With the growing importance of IIASA's research on global change, the American Academy is currently engaged

in conversations with the National Academy of Sciences to revitalize a cooperative relationship in support of IIASA.

Herman institutionalized the Academy's Committee on International Security Studies (CISS) to strengthen and expand the Academy's long-standing commitment to the study of arms control and security issues. CISS continues as one of the most active of the Academy's study groups.

Herman also developed the Kistiakowsky Scholars program to bring specialists in arms control, nuclear weapons, and security policy to speak at smaller colleges and universities lacking such experts, so as to expose undergraduates to these subjects.

In 1985 he organized an international symposium at the Academy to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of Niels Bohr. It included scientific discussions of quantum mechanics, policy discussions on the threat of nuclear weapons and the future of East-West relations, personal reminiscences of Bohr, and an international teleconference on the role of scientists in arms control, with participants from Boston, Moscow, and Copenhagen. He continued to serve the Academy by participating actively in meetings of its Council until his death in December 2000 at the age of 83.

I had the good fortune to count Viki and Herman among my friends for more than fifty years.