I AM NOT A REAL WEED SCIENTIST BUT I PLAY ONE IN DC. Robert R. Hedberg, Director of Science Policy, Weed Science Society of America, Washington, DC 20002.

Weed science is an inclusive discipline with no significant barriers to entry. A person's individual choice to self-designate themselves as a weed scientist and affiliate themselves with the discipline has always been adequate to gain entry into this field. Once embarked in the discipline, hard work, dedication, a sense of duty and an observant eye have typically yielded success and recognition. This openness offers many benefits for the discipline, but it also has some drawbacks. Certainly, our willingness to include agronomists, botanists, entomologists, ecologists, pathologists, physiologists and numerous other specialties within our discipline and within our societies has added to the enormous achievements of the past half –century. Currently however ambiguity about prerequisite skills and training may pose problems for the discipline. With the growing federal concern about invasive plants, significant retooling of existing staff to work in this arena is likely, and such retooled staff may lack the fundamental training and experience necessary to implement comprehensive, effective and efficient weed research, education, management and regulatory programs. It is incumbent on our societies to work with federal agencies to identify the fundamental knowledge, skills and abilities that are necessary at different weigh points along this weed management - weed science continuum.

Just as specific weed science training and experience is highly desirable in the individuals who will lead and implement federal, state and local weed programs; weed scientists should strive to acquire specific policy, communication and management skills. Some of these skills may seem alien to a scientific mindset but are fundamental in the policy arena. Within our discipline, extension educators best exemplify the skills that will contribute to our success influencing public policy. Specific skills to emulate are empathy for audience needs and interests, the ability to tailor information to specific audiences, active pursuit of allies and partners, willingness to compromise and acknowledge different viewpoints, a sense of public service, enthusiasm for the subject matter and timeliness. Ultimately, the success of our discipline will depend in large part on public support that in turn deponds on public belief in us as individual citizen scientists and science ambassadors. This public support must be sought and earned at every point form the local to the national level.