

New APCO President Thera Bradshaw's agenda gets tepid reception

Online Exclusive, Aug 19 2002

When Thera Bradshaw addressed the banquet audience at the APCO national conference in Nashville, Tenn., following her swearing in as the association's new president, the response to her remarks fell somewhat short of enthusiastic.

With their restraint, APCO members may have been showing some resistance to Bradshaw's specific action points and announcements. During the course of the conference, many speakers received standing ovations, but Bradshaw was denied. Perhaps by 9 p.m. on the fourth and last day of the conference, delegates simply were too tired to show much excitement.

A few indicated privately that Bradshaw may have set her course without first winning support from enough of the association's various leadership bodies, including its board of officers, executive council and committees.

Bradshaw outlined a four-point program, including a global reach for the association, alliances with other U.S. membership organizations, strategic thinking and leadership development.

Global reach — Bradshaw said that APCO is in a time and place where life-and-death stakes are real, and higher than before. She said that the association is in a world that suddenly seems much smaller and bound together by common threads that make public safety more important than at any other time.

She recounted that APCO previously responded to the needs of a society when it was founded following a world war when communications were unsophisticated. She recalled that APCO's first project was to assess the available radio frequencies and to push for federal solutions. She said that early on, APCO had recognized the need for standards and took steps to formulate and implement them.

"Now we must meet the challenges of the world to safeguard our communities and precious lives. Our new reality influences the day-to-day work we do as public safety leaders," she said.

"We must expand our global thinking. The events of this year reinforced what we already knew—the world's societies are linked by threats to public welfare that cross borders. In spite of this truth, we let the same geographic boundaries limit us. In the next year, I want APCO to engage worldwide to find solutions to our challenges. Such a goal is exciting, scary and ambitious. Our association has the ultimate responsibility to assume this leadership role," Bradshaw said.

At the same time she proposed a global expansion for the association, Bradshaw acknowledged that APCO "already is international with members in 34 countries and chapters and affiliates in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere. We have members in remote parts of the world who stay connected and watch how communications issues in the United States are resolved. I see ways to build

on this foundation for our benefit,” she said.

“We should be working more closely with the United Nations to promote global public safety advances,” Bradshaw said.

The new APCO president made two announcements regarding her agenda for a global reach.

“I’m thrilled to announce that APCO recently filed to become an affiliate of the United Nations member organization,” she said.

“And I’m excited to share the news that I’ve asked our international development committee to set in motion steps to host a first world congress in Europe this year. The congress will bring together public safety officials and policy leaders to lay the groundwork for homeland security worldwide,” Bradshaw said.

She said that APCO should not only represent its members to federal, state and local leaders, but should share its experiences and talent with those who influence policy and who provide solutions globally. She said that the association’s new focus internationally would be as important as any other goal on its agenda.

“By taking steps like these and reaching out around the world, APCO will be engaged on the world stage in 2002 and beyond,” she said.

Alliances — Bradshaw said that in the same way that APCO must work across international borders, it must forge stronger alliances to work across institutional lines.

“In this time and place, there is no room for old divisions and rivalries. It was here in this very location, Nashville, in 1995, that I passed the gavel to the National Emergency Number Association presidency. It’s here tonight that I’m honored to accept the presidency of international APCO,” she said.

“A cornerstone of my term will be to build bridges across the organizations united by common missions. This morning, APCO’s and NENA’s boards came together to plan a retreat to formulate joint missions for our members,” Bradshaw said.

Bradshaw then asked the president of NENA and the members of its board of officers, who were in the audience, to stand, and said, “I want to tell you—and thank you—for what an honor it was for me to serve as 1995 NENA president and to accept the presidency of international APCO here in the same location.”

She said that communications professionals, including police, fire, emergency medical service and the business community would have far greater effect with a unified message. She said that APCO has important roles to play by bringing parties together to further the cause of public safety.

Bradshaw cited APCO Project Locate as an example of an effort that showed the value of partnerships with key stakeholders, including the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the International Association of Fire Chiefs and associations representing elected officials in state and local government.

“Project Locate is a landmark initiative to promote enhanced 9-1-1 in model communities, an effort led by Bill Hinkle. I want to hasten the day when this lifesaving technology is implemented in every community in North America,” she said.

"In this context, I am so proud, honored and pleased that Chief Joseph Samuels of the Richmond (Calif.) Police Department, the incoming president of IAPC, and Chief Randy Bruegman of the Clackamas County (Ore.) Fire District, the incoming president of IAFC, have joined us tonight to show their commitment to a strong alliance and a strong public safety message," Bradshaw said.

She invited the two chiefs to stand and asked APCO members to introduce themselves to them following her speech.

"These are the men I get to be surrounded with during the next year to work with on your behalf. We will carry our message—a strong message that means so much at an important time," Bradshaw said.

"This is first time the three organizations have demonstrated such support for one another," she said, referring to the two chiefs' attendance, although APCO, IAPC and IAFC lobbyists have a long history of cooperating in representing public safety interests before the FCC and Congress.

"In addition to Project Locate, we have many projects with unique funding partnerships. Most recent is our foundation that grants monies back to local communities. Our association has stepped up to the plate for our membership to dedicate dollars to local governments to make something happen. The ability of a national organization to find money for use at the local level is groundbreaking and something we should all be proud of," Bradshaw said.

"In this new era, partnerships with federal agencies are more critical than ever. During the APCO Homeland Security Summit held in D.C., thanks to the vision of APCO First Vice President Greg Ballantine, we were pleased to hear, loud and clear, from federal officials that the federal government wants and needs to be a strong partner in our efforts to improve public safety," she said.

Bradshaw referred to the "town hall meeting" conducted on the first day of the national conference where the association heard from Ron Miller, chief information officer of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. She said that Miller reiterated that there is a significant and important role for APCO to be a key adviser to the federal government.

"Congress, state and federal officials have called on APCO to serve as the standards-setting organization. That is an awesome compliment to what this organization has done and what you have contributed for many years," Bradshaw said. "This is an opportunity to influence national policy at this level, and we must not turn our backs on this responsibility at this important time."

She said that APCO must continue to partner with the business community. Such collaborations could ensure that some of the best technologies are brought to the table for the communities served by APCO members in local government. She said that APCO must continue to look for partners who share the association's vision and who offer innovative and solutions for the job that APCO does for its membership.

Bradshaw introduced Tom Wheeler from the audience and said, "Our organization has a close working alliance with the Cellular Telecommunications and Internet Association. I am thrilled and honored that Tom Wheeler, CTIA's president and chief executive officer, is here to be with you and me tonight."

Strategic thinking — Bradshaw said that APCO "needs to begin thinking like strategists." She said that she wants the association to think about things in a proactive, rather than reactive, fashion.

She said that her goal in the year to come would be to ensure that APCO's membership is participating in

policy and regulatory discussions not just on American soil but worldwide because “decisions made by local lawmakers, federal lawmakers, Congress and around the world affect what we do at home. I am committed to making APCO a participant all of the time, not just some of the time.”

Bradshaw then made an announcement that some audience members later said took them by surprise: “In response to the desire of our membership and calls from public policy leaders, I can tell you tonight that APCO officially will open our office in Washington, D.C.” She said to Wheeler, “Tom, it will be across the street from you.

“We will be working daily now to forge strong relationships with federal policymakers. Having a D.C. presence is the only appropriate response when federal officials are calling on us and asking us for advice and counsel. APCO will be engaged in our nation’s capital,” she said.

Some have seen APCO as being a less effective federal policy advocate for having its headquarters in Florida instead of the Washington area where many politically active membership organizations maintain headquarters. Bradshaw didn’t say how the Washington office would be staffed or whether any Florida employees would be asked to relocate. Resistance on the part of headquarters staff to surrender the Florida lifestyle has been seen as a barrier to previous efforts to establish a permanent Washington presence beyond hired legal representation.

“In response to the terrorist attacks last year, a valuable window of opportunity opened for us, and we should seize that opportunity for the sake of people who lost their lives. With homeland security and unequalled resources dedicated to improving them, we will seize the opportunity to make our voice heard and bring home the resources to get the job done. From this day forward, APCO International will literally be in our nation’s capital, the most powerful city in the world,” she said.

“A lot of international delegates are here, and we are proud to be their partners in that effort, but nothing makes me more proud than to be in the capital of the richest and most powerful country in the world, America,” Bradshaw said.

Leadership development — Bradshaw said that she was committed to the development of future APCO leaders. She said that throughout her career, she had been surrounded by colleagues and friends who believed in her abilities and who supported her professional growth.

“My family believed in me, and they are here to share in this moment. Their confidence in me allowed me to reach more professional milestones,” she said.

“No one shows up completely ready to take charge. Our organization, with its critical mission, needs leaders. We must foster growth and development so we have a fountain of leaders to strengthen APCO in the future beyond tonight, including those who desire an active role in committees and project groups and who may have a goal of serving on this board of officers,” Bradshaw said.

“It’s up to us to ensure that our most talented committed colleagues participate and get training, education and support from us to excel. We are bearing the fruits of an ambitious effort to offer education to membership. The inaugural graduates of our virtual college were with us this week. I’m proud of them, and I know you are, too. The virtual college, through a partnership with Jacksonville State, is the first on-line advanced degree program for public safety communications officials, ensuring that our members become strong and capable leaders,” she said.

Bradshaw said that leadership development would be a top priority. She said that if APCO advances

leadership development efforts internally, the world would know that the association is strong because of its investment in developing influential leaders.

“Those are our goals for the year ahead. They will ensure a higher profile than we have had in years past. Walk with me on this journey and help me to achieve this ambitious agenda. It will make a difference. By relying on the diverse talents of everyone in this room, and all of APCO, I know we will succeed,” Bradshaw said.

“This is a new time and place with unprecedented threats to society that we don’t understand. But together, we can serve our communities and members who have a commitment to public safety. That, more than anything, would be a fitting legacy to the tragedy of Sept. 11. It will enable each of us here in this room tonight to show in some small way that we helped to make this world a better place,” she said.

“Now, let us go forth and continue our mission to serve the citizens of this great country and around the world,” Bradshaw concluded.

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