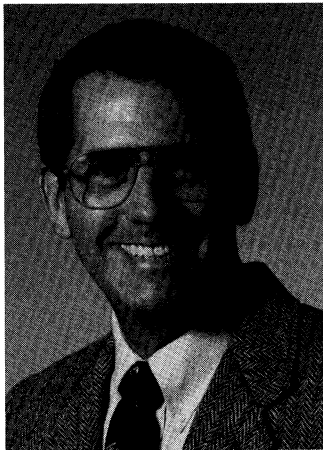


# The APS Officer Nomination Process: Is It Time to Change?

DONALD C. RAMSDELL  
APS Senior Councilor-at-Large



Some APS members feel that our present officer nomination process could be improved. The current system gives large administrative departments a definite advantage; if a large department decides to heavily support a certain member, he or she will probably gain nomination over a perhaps more qualified person from a smaller department. Candidates from federal and state laboratories or private industry appear to be at an even greater disadvantage. As a result of these disparities, some APS members feel

somewhat disfranchised—they say “my vote doesn’t count.” A somewhat paradoxical situation can arise, on the other hand, when very few people submit nomination slips and a member who is nominated for “first runner-up” and is not the best-qualified person for the job could be nominated. It is possible to elect a vice-president who has had no previous experience with the governance of APS or who may not even be active in the Society.

Let me review the present nomination process. During the winter, all APS members are mailed nomination ballots on which they are asked to write in the names of their nominees for the offices of vice-president and junior councilor-at-large. After the deadline date (usually mid-March), the nomination slips are counted by the intermediate councilor-at-large or by APS headquarters staff. Those receiving the largest number of votes for office are immediately contacted to determine their willingness to serve. Usually they are pleased to serve, but occasionally, for one reason or another, one or both decline. If both winners agree to serve if elected, a rank order is tallied for the next five individuals nominated for each office. The intermediate councilor-at-large then telephones the division councilors and a consensus on the “first runner-up” nominee is reached. Attention is paid to the number of nominating ballots received, but regional distribution of the composition of Council members and service to the Society are also considered. If the first clear winners decline to have their names placed on the ballot, then the intermediate councilor-at-large and the division councilors select both nominees for both offices from the names submitted. Of course, in order for their names to appear on the ballot, these four selected members also must

agree to serve. This system has worked fairly well, but it does have some imperfections.

In an effort to get some ideas for possible improvements for APS, I recently did some research into how some of our sister societies conduct their nominations. The American Society for Horticultural Science has a system almost identical to ours, including similar problems. The American Society for Microbiology nominates officers solely by a nominating committee; members then vote on the slate of nominees. The Entomological Society of America’s system is somewhat more complicated. That society has six divisions (geographic) and six subject matter subdivisions. Each division and each subdivision nominate a candidate (there is no nominating committee). The list of names is narrowed down at the national meeting after some politicking and caucusing, and finally a few names go on the ballot and the membership votes. The American Society of Agronomy has yet a different system. That society has four geographic regions (like our divisions). Each region has a nominating committee that submits two candidates. At the national meeting, a national nominating committee considers the eight names advanced by the regions and selects two names for inclusion on the ballot for membership consideration.

APS President Anne Vidaver has suggested we adopt a “two-tiered” system: 1) membership would provide nominations and the persons receiving the greatest number of nominations would, if willing, appear on the ballot, as is currently done, and 2) a nominating committee comprising the division councilors and the intermediate councilor-at-large would also select a nominee to be included on the ballot; this nominee would be picked from the entire APS membership and would not necessarily be among the persons nominated by the membership.

Before Council considers changing our method of nominating officers, I would like to hear from the APS membership. Let me know what you think about our present system, the systems of our sister societies, and the Vidaver proposal. I invite your comments, criticisms, and any new ideas you may have. Please send your responses to:

Donald Ramsdell, Senior Councilor-at-Large  
c/o Department of Botany and Plant Pathology  
166 Plant Biology Building  
Michigan State University  
East Lansing, MI 48824.

Please send your replies as soon as possible and no later than 15 February 1987, so I will be able to tally your opinions and present them to Council at the midyear meeting in St. Paul. An important policy change is being considered—let me hear from you!