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Second Century

A New Advocacy to Manage Risk

A simple question — "If not us, then who?" — is one that we have begun to ask at ARRL Headquarters as well as in Board meetings. This question is deeply rooted in a biblical passage, Isaiah 6:8: "Who will go for us?" The response is, "Here am I. Send me." The verse has resonated with me throughout my life.

ARRL at its core has two functions: the promotion and protection of amateur radio. We do this through our five pillars: Public Service, Advocacy, Education, Technology, and Membership. We debate those underpinnings, their meaning and scope, regularly to gut-check ourselves as to whether or not we are living up to the needs of our members.

Equally important is the role of ARRL as amateur radio's partner and witness. As powerful supporters and opponents of ARRL have risen and then fallen away over the decades, the fact that we are always there providing structure and support, promotion and defense of amateur radio has made the hobby strong and stable. Despite the din of more than a century of things such as single sideband and the internet promoted as being "the end of ham radio," ARRL has been steadfast in our responsibility to advance amateur radio for the benefit of our members. So, to that end, we have begun to ask the question: "If not us, then who?"

We are at an interesting crossroads for the hobby. On one hand, innovation is everywhere, especially in the area of software and networking. The latest digital modes connect us despite distance and signal strength. Advances in SDR-based radios and software make commonplace our ability to remotely access stations from anywhere — including poolside or hospital bedside.

On the other hand, important people, products, and services are more at risk today than ever. A portion of our community is "aging out." Aficionados of open-source software will tell you its greatest weakness is the long-term sustainability of code that is written by a sole developer. What happens to the code — as well as the related software, products, and services that relied on it — when the developer's attention or interest wanes? The same goes for ham radio. How much of what we take for granted on a daily basis, the many wonderful things that we are able to do with our radios and computers, relies on the innovation and contribution of just a small number of individuals.

An emerging role for ARRL is to encourage the technical innovators among us to include others and to build out

teams to support and bolster their efforts, so their good work continues on, and may even outlast them. This is a new advocacy for us.

We have also entered the world of evaluating acquisitions to protect products and services our members have counted on for years, even decades, from aging out and falling away. Our Executive Committee and Administration & Finance Committee have been key to me as CEO in looking at the landscape and determining whether or not ARRL should step in. After all, ARRL is a business, and despite our interest in protecting those things for our members, stepping in must make some sort of sense fiscally. I have been able to discuss individually and casually with the various committee members what my thinking is, and I am fortunate to have these groups ready to help.

In the past 6 months, I have pursued two opportunities that, regrettably, did not come to fruition. This aspect of business is nothing new to me, but it has been great learning to see how various factors play into the parameters of an amateur radio deal. There are others we would like to pursue, and perhaps the two we missed out on will come back as time moves on. At the end of the day, as ARRL moves on into its second century, ask yourself the questions, "If not us, then who?" and, as a Board member asked me just recently, "If not now, then when?"

What are your thoughts? Is this advocacy of managing risks to the hobby important to you? Is there something important to *you* that we should know about? As you look at certain products or services, and the (more than likely) sole proprietor offering them, would you want ARRL to ensure that those things will always be available to members? This is just a part of the messaging I have used in two recent keynote addresses that resonated very strongly with audience members. As always, be that connector, and be radio active!

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