

TO: SSA Directors  
FROM: Rick Sheppe  
DATE: February 9, 2007

Subject: Report on the formation of the Future Restructuring Task Force

This report covers my activities during the period from September 30, 2006 through November 22, 2006 (approximately 2 months).

### **My Task**

At the Fall BOD Meeting (September 30, 2006) the Directors voted to create a task force to design the future structure of our Society. The task force's goal, stated at the meeting, was "to have the SSA operating on a sound financial basis and providing the services that it perceived the membership wanted" by the beginning of 2008. I volunteered to expand the goal statement into a charter and to recruit the members of the Task Force. I estimated that it would take a month to do this. In fact, it took two months.

### **FRTF Email List**

Immediately after the meeting, I created the "FRTF Email List," which I used to keep everyone informed of my progress. The List consisted of SSA Directors, Officers, Directors-Elect, and FRTF candidates (both volunteers and nominees). I published to the List: a call for volunteers and nominees, a call for help in drafting the charter, status reports, and procedural matters. I solicited (and received) help from several members on the List. I did not publish a list of candidates or my private communications with advisors and candidates. I kept an archive of all publications to the FRTF Email List on the Web.

### **The Process Used to Create a Charter**

The charter is based on the notion of a "clean sheet of paper," and is consequently uncomplicated. The only limitation built into the charter is that it is not a charter to alter the purpose of SSA as it is stated in Article I, Section 2 of the bylaws.

An early debate about "restructuring" vs. "reorganization" led to a discussion of the existing SSA structure, which, it turned out, was not completely understood by everyone on the FRTF Email List. Consequently, I decided to write a pair of documents: a formal, but non-specific charter statement, and a non-binding commentary document that offered recommendations and suggestions for the Task Force to consider. The commentary document distinguishes between management (BOD), administrative (staff), and volunteer elements in our society's leadership and cites the need for all three to serve the needs of the fourth element, the membership.

The charter and the commentary were distributed to the Directors on 10/17/06 and published to the FRTF Email List on 10/23/06. Both documents evolved a bit as comments on their wording were received.

### **The Process Used to Choose Members**

The early phase of recruiting was fairly mechanical, requiring very little judgment. I published a job description, collected names and resumes from volunteers, and processed referrals from Regional Directors (and a few others). About a third of the referrals volunteered. In the end, 24 candidates emerged from a grand list of 50 names. In order to remain a candidate, a volunteer was required to read and accept the job description and to state a willingness to serve on the Task Force. About a dozen people were unable to commit the time, but were willing to serve as advisors.

The next phase was to reduce the list to a manageable number, a step which called for judgment. Without specific direction, I proposed to the FRTF Email List on 10/19/06 that I would reduce the list to approximately a dozen (still too large for a task force), submit this list to the Chairman of the Board, and await further instructions. I received no negative criticism of this plan.

I expanded the list of candidate criteria from the two discussed at the meeting (#5 and #12 below) to thirteen:

1. Acceptance of Job Description
2. Willingness to volunteer
3. Availability
4. People skills
5. Intimate familiarity with the sport of soaring as it is practiced in the United States
6. History of volunteering at the national level
7. Experience in SSA leadership
8. Business leadership experience
9. Non-profit leadership experience
10. Financial/Accounting/Comptroller experience
11. Fundraising experience
12. Geographic diversity
13. "Youth" (less than 50)

I weighted the various attributes according to my best judgment, considering the first five to be mandatory, and not insisting that every candidate have every attribute.

With the list thus reduced, I reported to the ExCom on 11/02/06. During that meeting, I learned that ExCom was reluctant to be the body that made the final selections. I accepted new instructions. I agreed to recruit a Chairman for the Task Force and to give the job of finalizing the member roster to the Chairman. This is what happened, and the Task Force membership was finalized on 11/22/06.

### **Controversies**

During the course of my activities, five controversies developed. The first four were due to the process itself, and the last one was a result of a decision I made. Here they are:

1. Is the "clean sheet of paper" too radical an approach?

Several commentators reacted negatively to the phrase "clean sheet of paper" in the meeting notes. They were concerned that FRTF would discard structural elements of SSA that should be preserved, for various reasons (including historical reasons). After consulting with the First Vice-Chairman, I published on 10/23/06 an assurance that FRTF would be charged with identifying and preserving our strengths. (The fact that the sheet of paper starts out clean doesn't imply that existing effective elements of our structure won't be placed on that sheet of paper). This seemed to satisfy the critics.

2. Is restructuring necessary?

Several correspondents expressed the opinion that we are overreacting to a personnel problem – that our structure is fundamentally sound, but those

operating within it did not perform as intended. I published a statement that this question was outside the scope of the FRTF charter. I stated that it is the BOD's responsibility to determine how much of our failure was personal and how much was structural. The task force will make recommendations regarding the structural component only. The draft task force charter, published on the same day (10/23/06), had nothing to say on the personal vs. structural question.

3. Are members who fly in contests able to represent the interests of members who do not fly in contests?

This question came up on 10/17/06 after I distributed a preliminary list of names to my fellow Directors. I did not see how this affected what I was doing, so I stayed out of the discussion.

4. Will the FRTF have too much/too little authority?

Some people thought that too much power was being given to a small group of unelected "super-directors." Others (potential volunteers, mostly) had the opposite complaint, that too much was being asked of a group whose role was merely advisory.

To both groups, I replied that the FRTF is a task force that is working within the system, not a new leadership group or a junta comprised of super-directors. The FRTF has no more authority to implement changes to SSA structure than the BOD has to abrogate its responsibility to obey the bylaws, or to relinquish policy-making to another group. On the other hand, the restructuring recommendations made by FRTF will be taken extraordinarily seriously by the Directors, because the alternative, the status quo, has obviously failed.

This reply reduced the volume of email comments on the issue, but I doubt it has resolved the controversy.

5. Should the call for volunteers be widely publicized?

I caused this controversy by insisting on strict control of the communications pathways. At least one of my fellow Directors believes that the call for FRTF volunteers should have been broadcast to the general membership. I decided that as long as I was in charge of the process, we would stick to the system described by some authors as "Regional Director Referral" and by others as "The good old boy network." I published my reasons in a document in which I also offered to resign from my leadership role. In my opinion, the referral system worked very well. I did not receive any requests to step aside.

### **Current Status**

The Task Force maintains current information on its website: <http://www.ssaregion1.org/frtf> (there is a plan to move to the SSA website, but this has not happened at the time of this writing).

I am happy to answer questions on the formation of the Task Force. Copies of the documents referenced in this report are available.