I apologize for missing the comment period, but am nonetheless offering the following thought for consideration in the QTR. This comment applies most closely to question 3, regarding principles the department should follow, but is really more about organization than about implementation.

I have spent some time working with staff in the applied technology offices on R&D management, which was at times very frustrating. There's one particular example that I think best highlights the organizational deficiency of the technology offices as a research funding organization: the annual progress reports, lists of publications, technical reports, etc., produced by the research funded by DOE are not available in any centralized location, and in many cases are not available at all. While I was sitting in DOE HQ I could easily find out who NSF was supporting doing any particular type of energy technology research, what they had produced over the last 5 years, etc., but I could only get that info from my own office if I could identify the relevant program manager, get them to return my e-mails, and if they could find it on their hard drive...This is clearly a lost opportunity to do lots of good things, and since it's a problem that's already been solved by the other major federal R&D funding organizations, it really should have been done at DOE long ago. Why hasn't it?

My take is that this glaring omission, and my own inability to make progress on addressing it during my brief time at DOE, is a direct consequence of the fact that there is almost no inter-digitation between the politicals and the career folks, at least in the applied technology offices. The political appointees and their staff are the ones who have the power and influence to institute significant operational changes, but typically don't have the institutional knowledge or long-time horizon necessary to actually implement them effectively. A high level 'research council', or something like that, composed of career staff but working closely with the leadership, would be the logical place to take ownership of the operational and organizational structures that are required to make the R&D enterprise run effectively. Such a structure would also give DOE a chance of having some continuity between administrators and administrations, because in many cases it's really not that hard to get agreement on much of what constitutes good R&D management.

Sincerely,
Jeffrey S. Urbach

Jeff Urbach
Professor, Department of Physics
Co-Director, Program on Science in the Public Interest
Director, Institute for Soft Matter Synthesis and Metrology
554 Reiss Science Building
Georgetown University, Washington, DC 20057
(202) 687-6594