As rappateur, I would like to summarize the comments made by the members of this panel and offer some commentary. To begin, let me recall one of many concerns James Madison had as he helped to frame and defend the Constitution and the Bill of Rights for what would become the United States. He feared factions. He thought that the new nation, organized under a constitution and a representative form of government, could survive as long as factions did not tear it to pieces. That concern seems to be a useful reminder as we summarize and reflect on the comments made by the panel members.

In the study of communication, my home discipline, we are reminded that unless people see common ground and share a set of values, their debates become monologues. Instead of listening to each other and looking for agreement, the tendency is to believe that only their point of view is correct. Over the years, scientists have generated lots of data regarding the environment and useful for solutions. We are faced with the question: What should we do with the data? Which interpretations are best? Which policies are wisest?

Insights and challenges emerge from what was said by the members of this panel. Four themes emerged from the panelists’ comments: problems of public perception, rights, stewardship, and common ground.

Public perception: To review the insights and challenges, let me begin with the data presented by Dr. Stephen Klineberg. People will interpret those data in many ways. Three themes are worth considering at the moment. First, the data suggest that differences of opinion are likely to frustrate deliberations about environmental issues. Groups of people do not agree. They have conflicting senses of what is and what ought to be. Second, their perceptions are inconsistent. They don’t like more governmental intrusion into their lives, for instance, except for that which is needed to improve the quality of the environment. Third, the data generated in that study suggest that people are self-centered. That finding is not novel. But it reminds us of the hard reality that people look to their own interest and expect others to give in on policy issues.

Rights: Having noted those concerns, we can look for the motivation that will bring people together, forcing them to bridge their differences. Dr. Ronald Kaiser correctly notes that several “hammers” can press people toward cooperation and compromise on environmental issues. One is the fact that some resources become limited. If only so much water exists, then people are compelled to solve the problem of sharing that limited resource. The second is law and regulation. Government can
mandate that factions solve problems and yield to one another as they meet requirements set by government. The third hammer, motivating people who bear responsibility for managing resources and creating positive change, is the public interest. Dr. Kaiser correctly notes the trust that is invested in government and community leaders to solve problems in the public interest. This he believes is the biggest hammer of all to be used to forge the incentives for compromise and collaborative decision making.

**Stewardship:** Resolution of difference and yielding to the public trust can bring solutions. That point is made by Richard Gorini who represented the Port of Houston Authority. He explained the problem and the means by which it was solved as many people worked together to create a beneficial uses plan for the Houston Ship Channel. Cooperation brought results.

**Finding Common Ground:** Linda Shead framed the challenge and the requirements needed to solve problems as she discussed the mechanism for finding common ground. The discovery of common ground begins with an acknowledged awareness of the differences of opinion that exist regarding the definition of a problem and the development of its solution.

Diversity can lead to the parts flying apart, going in all direction. To avoid this catastrophe, people must be willing to work together. A first step toward common ground is to gather information and allow input from all of the relevant parties. This broad base of interest and information almost guarantees that achieving common ground will be difficult. To keep the parts from flying in all directions—factions seeking to defeat and deny one another—they must seek common objectives and be project oriented. Time is an enemy of this process. To compete with time, diligence must prevail. The participants engaged in this process need to stick to the task and be patient with one another and with the process. Coupled with diligence is structure. The diverse parts need a means by which they can work together and continue to assure input and stay project oriented. Persons engaged in the process must have a commitment to achieve a solution. Deliberations can go on forever, but a commitment to achieve a solution is a constant pressure to resolve differences and obtain the best possible solution. People engaged in the process need to be willing and able to negotiate. Successful negotiation demands a win-win spirit. People must want all members to achieve their goals, and all goals need to be focused on achieving the best available solution. People must not fear that compromise and negotiation lead to a loss of their integrity. Throughout this process, the persons who are involved and administrators who are responsible for the process and product need to motivate each other. A stick must be available, but a carrot is preferred. If the process works form the grassroots level up, then government needs to play less of a role.

These were the comments of the “soft panel”. It was soft because it did not deal with technical data. But it asked and offered answers to the tough question. What are we going to do with all of the data? The challenge is to use it to make a difference on behalf of the public trust.