

## WASHINGTON NEWS

### FROM THE FEDERATION OF MATERIALS SOCIETIES

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#### COMPETITIVENESS BANDWAGON GAINS MOMENTUM

“Innovation” and “Competitiveness” are the new buzzwords in Washington, with Congress and the Administration continuing to propose new initiatives in the face of tight budget realities. One addition is a House Republican leadership package, entitled the “Innovation and Competitiveness Act” (H.R. 4845) by Rep. Bob Goodlatte (R-VA), chairman of the Republican High Tech Task Force, and publicly backed by Speaker Hastert and Majority Leader Boehner. Unlike the PACE and NIA bills in the Senate, the Goodlatte bill includes tort reform, tax and other proposals which do not track closely with many of the recent reports on the U.S. innovation predicament. House Science Committee Chairman Sherwood Boehlert (R-NY), who will carry the brunt of the burden of pushing such legislation through the House, welcomed the leadership’s interest but made clear that his committee is proceeding on its own. As he said at the press conference announcing the leadership package, “This..is a fine complement to the spending and programmatic aspects of the President’s American Competitiveness Initiative, but...it is no substitute for them.” The Science Committee is developing legislation that would implement the President’s plan, but Chairman Boehlert cautioned that “we are still doing our homework.” In a package of bills he hopes to report out by the end of May, the Chairman plans to include “authorizing the 10-year investment plan proposed by the President, setting aside funds for transformational research and young researchers, and directing some research funds to topics of national priority, including energy research. The Committee will...develop legislation to increase the nation’s focus on science and math education at the K-12 and undergraduate levels and to bolster education programs within our agencies.”

In the Senate, meanwhile, the Energy and Natural Resources Committee has reported out the energy-related bill in the PACE package, and Senator John Ensign (R-NV) has reintroduced the National Innovation Initiative provisions which fall under the Commerce Committee’s jurisdiction to enable them to move more smoothly through the committee process. An unexpected push is coming from Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA), ranking minority member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee. His bill, the “Right TRACK Act” (The Right Time to Reinvest in America’s Competitiveness) would authorize:

- A 10-percent annual increase over seven years in research and development at the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, and NASA, basic

research at the Department of Energy's Office of Science, and basic (6.1) and applied (6.2) research at the Department of Defense;

- Increased funding for the National Science Foundation's Math and Science Partnership program and the Teacher Institutes for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century program;
- A new "Contract for College Opportunity" grant program;
- Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) grants;
- Increased federal student loan forgiveness for teachers of math, science, engineering and critical foreign languages who teach in high-poverty schools;
- Increased study abroad and foreign language study opportunities for students; and
- New summer institutes to help teachers integrate international content into their curricula and improve their knowledge and teaching of foreign languages and cultures.

And Senator Rick Santorum (R-PA) has introduced the SEEK Act (Securing Excellence in Education for our Kids in Math and Science). The bill echoes many of the themes in President Bush's competitiveness initiative, including expanding access to Advanced Placement coursework in high schools along with providing grants, tax relief and other incentives to university students and companies to increase the number of qualified science and math teachers.

## **BUDGET REALITIES**

While the climate has never been better for innovation and competitiveness legislation, budget constraints will come into play. The outlook is good for authorizing legislation – basically saying, this is the policy of the country in regard to research and education – but the crunch will come in the appropriations process – actually meting out the money. In the House, for example, virtually all non-defense research funding is handled in a subcommittee that also includes the Departments of State and Justice. Even within the science portfolio, there will be competing pushes for NASA and NOAA against the NSF and NIST budgets. As one veteran observer said this month, "hurricane season is coming, and NOAA needs money to predict its severity; NASA is glamorous and means jobs."

## **NASA BUDGET PRIORITIES DEBATED**

The House Science Committee held hearings this month to highlight Congressional concerns over the priorities in the Administration's proposed budget for NASA. Retiring Committee Chairman Sherwood Boehlert (R-NY), a long-time champion of NASA science programs, said "I see science as the most successful aspect of NASA, one that expands the human mind, excites students, pushes technology, provides vital information about our own planet, and helps make the U.S. a world leader." Witnesses at the hearing, including the chairmen of various decadal studies at NASA, agreed that if NASA does not get more money for science than proposed, then NASA should first preserve smaller scientific missions and research funding rather than setting aside funds for large, flagship missions.

## **CLARIFICATION URGED FOR RESEARCHER VISAS**

Four higher education associations have urged the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to issue guidance to regional service centers clarifying the rules for considering visa petitions for outstanding professors and researchers, and to allow previously denied petitions to be reopened. Some regional offices are denying universities' immigrant petitions for outstanding professors or researchers on the basis that these individuals do not qualify as permanent university employees. According to the associations, these decisions "will lead to the inability of our institutions to recruit and retain the most outstanding and highly regarded scholars and scientists around the world."