

FMS Workshop Displays What's in Store for Materials Policy

The Federation of Materials Societies, of which MRS is a member, sponsored a one-day workshop to educate member societies, and others interested, about the "Impact of the New Congress on Materials Policy" on March 15. During the day each speaker emphasized that major changes are taking place that will have a profound effect on the funding for science and engineering in the United States. Many programs of importance to the materials research community are in jeopardy. It is clear that no one will come to the defense of materials research if the practicing scientists and engineers fail to speak up. Workshop speakers pointed out that while technical societies have an important role to play in educating policymakers about the impact of their decisions regarding science and technology, the most effective communication is by individuals and small groups in the districts represented by key representatives and senators.

The highlight of the workshop was the presentations of two congressional staff members, Thomas Weimer (R), Staff Director, House Science Subcommittee on Basic Research, and Patrick Windham (D), Senior Professional Staff Member, Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Science, Technology and Space. These presentations summarized the likely directions of the 104th Congress for policy relevant to materials. A major goal of the present Congress is to cut back on major discretionary funding so as to balance the budget near the turn of the century and to fulfill a number of pledges made in the "Contract with America." Many new members of Congress have come to Washington with the intention of cutting the size of government, and they will be very committed to that task. Less than one-third of the budget is truly discretionary, and that includes funding for science and technology as well as defense and many social programs. Unless "entitlements" are put on the table, nonentitlements will suffer major reductions in the next few years. One-half of the House Science Committee consists of new members within the last two years who are generally unfamiliar

with past programs or materials issues. Nonfundamental science is under special scrutiny with the focus on reductions in technology and technology transfer activity. Major structural changes being discussed include the elimination of cabinet-level departments such as the Department of Energy (DOE) and Commerce (DOC), perhaps coupled with the creation of a Science Department, championed by Robert Walker (R-Pa), chair of the House Science Committee, to manage "Science" functions currently spread across various government departments including DOE and DOC. While Democratic views support a continued commitment to science and technology, they also recognize that cuts are inevitable. The House is more extreme in its positions than the Senate so that some House actions are likely to be moderated by Senate actions. Nevertheless, the trend toward dramatic spending cuts is very real.

The view from the major funding agencies—National Science Foundation (NSF), Department of Defense (DOD), DOE, and National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)—was also presented. Because of its historic emphasis on basic research, NSF is likely to be less affected by budget cuts than many other agencies. DOD has felt the impact of the new Congress with changes and reduced effort for dual use programs, defense conversion, and the Technology Reinvestment Program (TRP). So far, the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) has been able to maintain the Advanced Materials Partnership program. Defense conversion and downsizing could, however, cause draconian cuts in ARPA's support of university materials work. DOE programs have not been dramatically affected yet, but uncertainty remains about the organization of government efforts in DOE, including the impact of the recommendations of the Galvin report [see *MRS Bulletin*, April 1995, page 17]. The present laboratories are expected to continue with some refocusing and reductions. The Advanced Technology Program (ATP) under the auspices of NIST will probably experience some scale

back, but immediate elimination is thought to be unlikely. The current rescission actions for ATP and TRP are a sign that the new Congress will not hesitate to make dramatic changes in the Administration's top priority programs.

From the industry side, trade associations are having difficulty getting the attention of major decision makers within Congress. They believe that a grassroots effort by individuals will be more important in the future.

Universities are examining their degree programs at all levels—for example, increasing emphasis on processing and including industrial on-site components for each student. In the face of declining government support, the funding needs for innovative educational programs will have to be focused on increased industrial support. A very real fear of the university community is that this sector will be overlooked or funding and support for facilities dropped dramatically as the current debate on reduction in government funding proceeds.

The major points emerging from the workshop were:

1. The materials community must communicate to policymakers the facts that materials research is an enabling discipline that has contributed significantly to our quality of life, to national competitiveness, and to job creation, and that the future health of the economy depends on continued long-term investment.
2. The roles of government, industry, and academia in the chain from basic research to final product are in a state of flux. A new paradigm must be developed which takes into account the issues currently affecting each sector. While each sector has an important role to play in materials research, these roles are going to be vastly different from what they have been for the last 50 years.

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