

An analysis of public policy issues and how they affect MRS members and the materials community...

MRS Signs Multisociety Letter Calling for Increased NIST Funding

As a member society of the Alliance for Science & Technology Research in America (ASTRA), the Materials Research Society joined 112 individuals and organizations in signing a multisociety letter to the U.S. Congress calling for an increase in funding for the National Institute of Standards and Technology

(NIST). With this letter, ASTRA is assisting the much-broader Coalition for NIST Funding. The coalition's concerns include nanotechnology and laboratory investments as well as enabling small technology startups to bridge the gap between the initial discovery and ultimate commercialization of key technologies. The letter

was sent to Rep. J. Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.), speaker of the House, in April 2004. Copies were sent to Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif., minority leader), and to the leaders and select members of the House Committees on Appropriations and on Science. □

April 21, 2004

The Hon. J. Dennis Hastert
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
235 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker:

The undersigned companies, associations, universities, professional societies and individuals write to you representing more than one million scientists and engineers, and 90 percent of America's industrial capacity. We urge Congress to increase investment in the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), which is vital to our industrial innovation, global competitiveness, and national security.

We support the Administration's request to provide \$422 million for **NIST's Laboratory Program**. While seemingly high, a 25% increase in large measure will only partly compensate for damaging cuts during FY 2004. Moreover, we oppose the proposed termination of the **Advanced Technology Program** and recent cuts to the **Manufacturing Extension Partnership**.

Sustaining the documented success of the ATP and MEP efforts will require FY 2005 appropriations of at least FY 2003 levels for these programs (\$179 and \$106 million, respectively). In the last two years, the House has passed three NIST authorizations—for enterprise integration, cybersecurity, and nanotechnology—and we call for these programs to also be properly funded.

NIST Laboratories. The world-leading standards and measurement work carried on by NIST for a century underlies every test or experiment carried out in industry

and higher education and provides the foundation for U.S. quality control.

Any list of specific applications is lengthy and impressive and includes: building and fire research, including smoke detector sensitivity, thus preventing deaths every year and dealing with the terrorist threat; bullet-proof body armor; precision machining and semiconductor manufacturing in particular; nanotechnology; cybersecurity; voting technology; fuel composition; and the energy efficiency of appliances. Moreover, the appropriation from Congress provides a foundation for NIST laboratories to conduct critical, and compensated, work on behalf of numerous other Executive Branch agencies.

Many independent studies show that every dollar invested in NIST measurement and standards programs returns at least three dollars in national economic benefits. In the last few years, NIST scientists garnered two Nobel prizes in physics, yet the cuts in the FY '04 budget guarantee a significant reduction in force. Also not to be overlooked are the **Baldrige Quality Award**, and the need to fund multiple new assignments to NIST under the Administration's manufacturing initiative.

Advanced Technology Program (ATP). This program addresses the short-term focus of capital markets that makes it extremely hard for businesses to find funding for promising but long-term and high-risk projects. It marries two time-tested government funding mechanisms: the peer review of scientific grants, and the cost-sharing mechanism typical of weapons development programs.

The resulting ATP program has worked so well that several other nations have copied it. About 75 percent of ATP grants are awarded to small businesses. World "firsts" that have issued from ATP grants include laser-guided boring, digital X-ray and mammography, and corn-

derived polymers. A National Academy of Sciences Panel recently concluded, "The ATP is an effective government-industry program."

Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP). The MEP program is the only federal program that provides direct support to small and mid-size manufacturers wishing to modernize and to improve productivity. The MEP maintains, in cost-sharing partnership with state governments and fee-paying clients, a national network of 400 assistance centers in all 50 states that have served 150,000 of small businesses to date, notably including defense suppliers.

MEP clients have boosted their capital investment, increased profits as a direct result of their MEP involvement, and have paid increased federal taxes which more than pay for the program itself. We join with the numerous executives who have testified to Congress or the Commerce Department in favor of the program, as well as the 200 members of the House who supported the MEP last year.

We also support increases in the **Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award Program** of \$1.5 million to accommodate a new category for this prestigious program. The Baldrige National Quality Program is focused on strengthening U.S. competitiveness by helping to improve organizational practices, capabilities, and results. An independent study in 2001 by economists Link and Scott documented that this unique, highly-leveraged private-public partnership delivers a benefit-to-cost ratio for the economy as a whole of 207-to-1.

Mr. Speaker, NIST is a vital agency whose work to make American industry the most efficient and productive in the world should be promoted, not cut back.

Sincerely,
[113 signatures]