

CongressDaily

SCIENCE - Holt, Biggert Push Increased Investment For Major Agencies

Andrew Noyes

March 5, 2008

Reps. Rush Holt, D-N.J., and Judy Biggert, R-Ill., the co-chairs of the Congressional Research Caucus, joined scientists, engineers and graduate students Tuesday to push for additional funding of major science agencies as lawmakers consider President Bush's FY09 budget request.

The event, sponsored by the Science Engineering and Technology Working Group, was part of a two-day lobbying blitz that brought hundreds of stakeholders from the science and technology arena to Capitol Hill. They want more money for NASA, the National Science Foundation, Defense Department and the Energy Department's Office of Science.

Congress has been "underinvesting significantly in research in virtually every sector of our economy," said Holt, a physicist and former assistant director of the Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory. The recently passed economic stimulus package "might not even have been necessary if we'd been making in past years the investments we should have been making in research and development," he added.

White House science adviser John Marburger told the House Commerce-Justice-Science Appropriations Subcommittee last week that the requested \$147 billion for research and development reinforces Bush's commitment to the America Competes Act, which authorized increases in science, math and technology funding.

"Unless we take a drastically different approach this year, I think we'll slip further and we'll miss many opportunities," Holt said. Appropriators failed to fully fund the initiative for FY08 and Biggert said she and others are angling for a \$500 million supplemental.

Federal scientists and researchers have been "drowned out" in recent budget cycles and "partisan rhetoric" that has stymied those investments must not prevail, she said. "Their work is simply crucial to American competitiveness over the next century."

The American Chemical Society's immediate past president, Catherine Hunt, said funds for a number of discontinued initiatives -- including the National Institute of Standards and Technology's exploratory science program -- should be reinstated through a supplemental. "It's now time for us to do the hard work of ensuring the future and ensuring the funds are appropriated," she said.

Russell Lefevre, president of the technology standards body IEEE, said the group's message is clear: "Research is an investment, not an expense."



SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Lawmakers, Scientists Urge Larger Federal Commitment to Science

By: Brandon Stumbo

CongressNow Staff

March 4, 2008

Reps. Rush Holt (D-N.J.) and Judy Biggert (R-Ill.) joined with a number of prominent scientists today at a news conference urging Congress not to short-fund key science agencies.

Biggert said the research community is dissatisfied with the 2008 omnibus appropriation package, which she said left many programs wanting for funds. Some of these programs include NASA and the National Science Foundation.

Holt asserted that while only 4 percent of the American workforce is made up of scientists and researchers, their productivity creates jobs that impact more than 96 percent of the workforce. He added that the recent economic stimulus package might not have been necessary if research had been properly funded in the last few decades.

"Research and development is where we should be putting our money," Holt said.

Dr. Russell Lefevre, a fellow of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers was among the speakers from the scientific and research community who said they are concerned about the competitiveness of U.S. research and development on the global scale.

"Research is an investment, not an expense," Lefevre said.

Speakers also expressed concerns that a lack of funding is discouraging the younger generation from pursuing careers in research and the hard sciences.

"This is sending a message not only to the international community ... but also to our young people ... that we are not going to properly fund them," Biggert said.

Dr. John Geissman of the American Geophysical Union and graduate students representing the higher education community, emphasized how a lack of funding could threaten the future of their disciplines.

"The attractiveness of research is waning," said Massachusetts Institute of Technology graduate student Al Swiston.

According to Geissman, students are abandoning research fields because the outlook for funding is far from certain. Geissman described the current funding situation as the "worst of times."

Biggert did interject a sense of optimism about the future of scientific research.

"Fortunately, we have the opportunity to stop the 'brain drain' and put America back in the lead when it comes to research and development," Biggert said.