

NEWS

Congressional Fellows Program Honored by Congress

In an October 28 speech on the House floor, Rep. Fortney "Pete" Stark (D-CA), called the Congressional Science and Engineering Fellowships "a shining example of a collaborative program that benefits all who participate." The fellowships, he said, are "a remarkable partnership between Congress and the 30 or so participating professional societies that select and fund the Fellows." Rep. Vern Ehlers (R-MI), who introduced the resolution, described the fellowships as "a truly valuable educational program that gives scientists a wonderful opportunity to step out of the lab and into the political process."

The above remarks were made during debate on a congressional resolution honoring the 30th anniversary of the Congressional Fellowship program of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) and pledging continued congressional support for the program. AIP and three of its Member Societies (APS, the American Geophysical Union, and the Optical Society of America) all sponsor Congressional Fellows under the auspices of the AAAS program. In fact, APS was one of the original societies to participate in the program. The resolution, which has now been referred to the Senate, finds that "Fellows bring to the Congress new insights and ideas, extensive knowledge, and perspectives from a variety of disciplines."

The AIP and APS Fellowships enable qualified members of APS or any of the nine other AIP Member Societies to spend a year on Capitol Hill, working in the office of a Member of Congress or for a congressional committee. Fellows work with personal offices and congressional committees to select an assignment that interests them. They do not act as representatives of AIP or APS during their time on Capitol Hill; their only responsibility is to the congressional office in which they choose to serve.

Some Fellows accept permanent positions on Capitol Hill or in federal agencies after their Fellowships, while others return to academia or industry, to share their experience of the legislative process with others in the science community. The APS 1982-1983 Congressional Science Fellow, Rep. Rush Holt (D-NJ), was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, where he is now serving in his third term.

During discussion of the resolution, several Members of Congress spoke in praise of the Fellowships. Selected portions of the discussion are provided below:

REP. VERNON EHLERS (R-MI): "This resolution...recognizes a truly valuable educational program that gives scientists a wonderful opportunity to step out of the lab and into the political process.... [T]hey get a behind-the-scenes look at how our laws are made, writing speeches, developing legislation, and serving as liaisons to committees on which a Member serves. At the same time Members of Congress and other policy makers gain a valuable new resource to help them better understand the scientific and technical issues underpinning complex policy debates.... After 30 years, this program is still going strong. Over 800 scientists have now served Republican, Democratic, and Independent Members of Congress and many are currently working for Congress and the administration. These individuals have contributed not only their scientific expertise, but also a fresh perspective to policy making."

REP. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON (D-TX): "The AAAS Congressional Science and Engineering Fellowship Program has provided congressional committees and Members' offices with scientific and technical expertise that has greatly benefitted governmental decision-making or three decades.... I know that many of my colleagues have repeatedly sought AAAS fellows for their personal offices because of the quality of the contributions they have made.... The presence of congressional fellows enhances the public policy formulation process. In addition, the program provides fellows with a window on the policy formulation process and the workings

of Congress that they take back to their home institutions. It also provides a mechanism that many fellows have used to transition to careers in public service.... [T]he American Association for the Advancement of Science is to be congratulated for creating this successful and valuable congressional fellows program."

REP. RUSH HOLT (D-NJ): "For 30 years, the fellowship program has brought together Members of Congress with leading scientific practitioners and scholars in a variety of scientific fields. And this has provided a level of scientific expertise not otherwise found on most congressional staffs, and it presents the congressional fellows with an intimate role in the process of decision-making in public policy.... I was an AAAS Fellow 20 years ago...and I witnessed firsthand the important role that scientific expertise can bring to policy decisions. "Since I have been a Member of Congress for the past 5 years, I have welcomed AAAS Fellows into my staff and fully integrated them into my staff because of the wealth of knowledge they provide and their ability to pose questions.... I have benefitted from their aptitude, their ability and their energy; and I will, as long as I serve in this body, continue to recruit these motivated and high-qualified experts and do everything I can to make this programa success. It has, in many ways, benefitted America."

REP. VERNON EHLERS (R-MI): "I thank the gentleman from New Jersey[Rep. Holt] for his comments and his co-sponsorship on this resolution.... He and I, as most people know, are the only two physicists in the Congress and I am told are the only two that have ever served in this Congress. That, I think, is an indictment of the scientific community because we should have more scientists in the Congress, but most scientists tend to shy away from this particular type of activity. But the Fellows that we are honoring here have filled the gap, as the gentleman from New Jersey has so clearly outlined. They provide some very badly needed scientific advice.... [T]he Fellows are extremely important in maintaining the scientific competence of the Congress, both House and Senate. Many of the Fellows have returned to their laboratories where they serve as a good liaison between the scientific communities and the Congress. Many others have chosen to stay here.... [Y]ou will find many former science Fellows in the halls of Congress, in the administration, playing a very vital role in keeping this Nation's governing bodies current in science. So this has been a very valuable enterprise."

REP. EDWARD MARKEY (D-MA): "I have welcomed over twenty AAAS Fellows into my office since 1979 and have been consistently impressed by their contributions to policymaking and advising. They have made a significant positive impact on the quality of life for the people of Massachusetts, the United States, and the world by instilling a measure of science and humanity into the decisions we are asked to make in these chambers every day."

REP. FORTNEY "PETE" STARK (D-CA): "This program is a remarkable partnership between Congress and the 30 or so participating professional societies that select and fund the Fellows. At no cost to Congress, these Fellows offer their substantial expertise and experience to various personal offices and committees in return for the opportunity to be immersed in the legislative process. I have been fortunate enough to work with many AAAS fellows over my Congressional career. Without exception, they have been valuable additions to my staff. I especially appreciate the real world perspective they bring to us.... In my office, a fellow is treated exactly as other members of my staff. They have issue areas of expertise and perform all of the duties necessary to move those issues forward."

REP. SHERWOOD BOEHLERT (R-NY): "The AAAS [program has made]literally incalculable contributions to this institution and the nation. It has enabled scientists to have a better understanding of the governing process - both the fellows themselves and scientists with whom they interact - and it has improved the governing process by enabling Congressional

offices to better understand scientific information and scientists. The fellows program has also been an entry point for many of the best staff we have on Capitol Hill."

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Final Funding Legislation on Administration's Nuclear Weapons Initiatives

Final legislation has been developed in the House and Senate that responds to the Bush Administration's nuclear weapons initiatives. The FY 2004 Energy and Water Development appropriations bill contains language and funding supportive of the Administration's requests regarding the development of the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator, Advanced Concepts, and the readiness posture of the Nevada test site.

The House and Senate versions of the Energy and Water Development appropriations bill were very different in their treatment of the Administration's requests. Republican Chairman David Hobson (Ohio) and his fellow House appropriators' committee report criticized congressional policymaking procedures, stating, "...this Committee will not assume that all of the proposed nuclear weapons requests are legitimate requirements." The House bill provided only one-third of the Administration's funding request for the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator, and no money for Advanced Concepts definition studies or funding to shorten test readiness posture at the Nevada site. The House approved this bill, setting it on an eventual collision with the Senate bill, crafted by Senator Pete Domenici (R-New Mexico). Press accounts reported that one of the major points of contention in this bill's conference committee was the language on the Administration's nuclear weapons initiatives.

The final conference report language has been completed. In regard to the Administration's \$15.0 million request for the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator, House Report 108-357 states:

"The conferees provide \$7,500,000 for the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator study, instead of \$5,000,000 as proposed by the House and \$15,000,000 as proposed by the Senate. The conferees remind the Administration that none of the funds provided may be used for activities at the engineering development phases, phase 3 or 6.3, or beyond, in support of advanced nuclear weapons concepts, including the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator."

Concerning the Administration's request of \$6.0 million for Advanced Concepts Definition Studies, such as low-yield nuclear weapons, the report states:

"The conferees provide \$6,000,000 for Advanced Concepts, as proposed by the Senate, of which \$4,000,000 is available for obligation only after the official delivery of a revised Nuclear Weapons Stockpile plan to Congress and a 90-day review period by the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations and the Committees on Armed Services. The revised Nuclear Weapons Stockpile plan should detail the Department of Defense and Department of Energy's program plan and detailed schedule to achieve the President's proposed inventory adjustments to the Total Strategic Stockpile, including the Strategic Active Stockpile and Inactive Stockpile, by weapon systems and warhead type."

Responding to the Administration's request to reduce the current 24-36 month test readiness posture at the Nevada test site, the report states:

"Within funds provided for program readiness activities the conference agreement provides \$24,891,000 for test readiness in Nevada, the same as the [Bush Administration's] budget request. The conferees recognize that test readiness activities in Nevada were allowed to atrophy

during the last decade under the current nuclear test moratorium as documented by the DOE Inspector General and the NNSA's [National Nuclear Security Administration] internal assessments. However, the conferees expect the NNSA to focus on restoring a rigorous test readiness program that is capable of meeting the current 24-month requirement before requesting significant additional funds to pursue a more aggressive goal of an 18-month readiness posture. The conferees expect the House and Senate Appropriations Committees be kept informed on the progress of restoring the current test readiness program. The conferees remind the Administration that Congressional authorization must be obtained before proceeding with specific activities that support the resumption of testing."

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