

U.S. Government Relations

AAAS reaches out to policymakers to reinforce the awareness that science and technology can drive our economy and improve our quality of life. By making objective scientific expertise available to the federal government, the AAAS Office of Government Relations helps to support evidence-based policy decisions and keep citizens informed about where their elected officials stand on pressing issues related to science and technology.

GOLDEN GOOSE AWARDS PROMOTE BASIC SCIENCE

AAAS helped launch an award program designed to celebrate the enormous human and economic benefits attributable to basic scientific research. The Golden Goose Awards—a collaboration with U.S. lawmakers from both parties and science, business and education leaders—honor federally funded researchers, especially those whose work may have initially

sounded odd but resulted in extremely valuable discoveries to benefit society. The awards are a kind of retort to lawmakers such as the late Senator William Proxmire (D-Wisconsin), who mocked certain research projects as wasteful spending.

AAAS and the coalition supporting the awards announced the winners in September 2012, publicizing scientists' accomplishments and struggles in a *Washington Post* op-ed that also appeared in other media outlets. The winners included Charles H. Townes, who was reportedly warned not to waste resources on the research he undertook to help develop laser technology; Osamu Shimomura, Martin Chalfie and Roger Y. Tsien, whose research on jellyfish nervous systems unexpectedly led to advances

in cancer diagnosis and treatment, progress with brain diseases, and improved detection of poisons in drinking water; and Eugene White, Rodney White, Della Roy and the late Jon Weber, who developed materials

used in bone grafts and prosthetic eyes based on coral's microstructure.

SPEAKING UP FOR U.S. R&D

Pointing to such transformational research as the Human Genome Project, the AAAS Office of Government Relations worked throughout 2012 to build awareness of the importance of federally funded scientific research and the crippling effects on innovation and economic growth of a budget sequestration that would make automatic cuts to such programs.

Government Relations staff organized Capitol Hill briefings—drawing on analyses of the AAAS R&D Budget and Policy Program and compelling evidence from other AAAS units—to underscore the enormous economic and human benefits that federal investment in research can yield, such as the Google search engine and GPS technology. The briefings pointed out how cuts to the federal research budget, threatened to be the largest in about 40 years, could hobble future prosperity.

Expert panelists at one of the briefings said that many new technologies are rooted in disparate fields and are often being developed by universities and smaller start-up companies, rather than large corporations. Both trends, the panelists said, suggest an increasingly important role for federally funded research and development because federal programs already support significant cross-disciplinary work at public laboratories and universities.

AAAS also hosted its annual Hill briefing



presenting its analysis of the presidential budget request for research and development. “Now more than ever,” said U.S. Representative Judy Biggert (R-Illinois), who spoke at the event, “the advocacy message for strong basic research investments must be heard loud and clear across the Capitol campus if we want to remain a global leader in innovation.”

AAAS also offered a Web site with a huge range of resources pertaining to the threatened sequestration and participated in an online campaign to get AAAS members and others in the scientific community to speak out about how sequestration cuts could harm their research.

“We want to ensure that the scientific community is heard on this critical issue,” said Joanne Carney, AAAS Office of Government Relations director.

COMMUNICATING ABOUT CLIMATE, ENERGY, FOOD AND WATER

The second annual Climate Science Day, held in February 2012, brought about 30 scientists to Washington, D.C., to build relationships with members of Congress and provide them with access to the best possible climate science information.

“Part of being a good scientist is helping policymakers do their job well by being an objective resource and providing scientific information that they then use in policy decisions,” said Carney, of the AAAS Office of Government Relations, which co-sponsors the effort along with a dozen other scientific professional societies and research organizations.

The scientists, who were coached in a training session, didn’t press for particular policies or funding with the lawmakers, but worked to build bridges. “We were not there to debate whether global warming was occurring,” said Steven Cavallo, an atmospheric scientist at the University of Oklahoma, who met with the all-Republican and strongly conservative Oklahoma congressional delegation. “We were just there to open up the discussion, establish a relationship with them.”

Climate was also a key theme during the Global Challenges fall lecture series, co-organized by AAAS. Featured topics in the



Biometeorologist Hongyan Luo of the National Ecological Observatory Network in Boulder, Colorado, met with U.S. Senator Michael Bennet (D-Colorado) as part of Climate Science Day, an effort to provide policymakers with high-quality climate science information.

series included the energy-water-food nexus and the effect of climate change on the Arctic. During the Arctic panel, speakers noted that accelerating climate change reduces the Arctic region’s summer ice and uncovers natural resources. At the same time, indigenous populations are threatened and carbon held in Arctic soils is released, compounding the effects of global greenhouse gas emissions. Worldwide climate patterns may be slowed such that extreme conditions related to droughts and floods may last longer.

SCIENCE AND THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Policymakers’ positions on science- and technology-related issues have become increasingly important in an era of budget-cutting as U.S. science education struggles, climate change and energy needs present enormous challenges, medical research is on the threshold of transformative discoveries, and the national economy requires innovative technologies to spur growth. How science and technology are viewed at the highest levels could determine the shape of our futures.

AAAS developed a Web site to continuously track the 2012 presidential candidates’ positions on science and technology issues. The association also joined other leading U.S. science and engineering organizations in preparing a list of science questions that were answered by the candidates.

