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SPIE volunteers urge Washington to maintain strong science support

BELLINGHAM, Washington, USA -- 7 May 2009 -- SPIE volunteers from 10 states made more than 30 visits to Congressional offices during an annual event focused on science, engineering, and technology issues last week in Washington, D.C. Their message: Research in these fields is strongly linked to economic recovery, and policies and legislation that support this research are vital to the recovery's success.

The SPIE volunteers were among others from approximately 30 organizations participating in Science-Engineering-Technology Working Group (SETWG)

Congressional Visits Day forums and visits held 28 and 29 April on the Capitol campus.

In particular, SPIE team members stressed the importance of photonics in a high-tech economy, long-term funding for science and technology R&D, strong math and science education at all levels, and the easing of barriers to U.S. science and technology leadership, such as restrictive trade and visa regulations.

Participants from SETWG and The Science Coalition (TSC) were joined by the House Research and Development Caucus at a press conference during the event in stressing the link between research and recovery. They noted that investments in science research funding have the effect of lifting regional and local economies across the United States, and result in new infrastructure and new jobs.

Ralph James, President Elect of SPIE, illustrated the connection between research and federal funding from his perspective as a manager at Brookhaven National Lab.



SPIE President Elect **Ralph James**, left, and fellow SPIE Congressional Visits Day volunteers **Anastasios Maurudis**, second from right, and **Silvia Mioc**, far right, congratulate Rep. **David Obey** on winning the George E. Brown, Jr., Award.

"Stimulus funds have been game-changing at Brookhaven," he said, echoing comments from others on the SPIE team whose labs also are using stimulus funding.

Speakers at the briefing praised President Barack Obama's pledge earlier in the week at the National Academy of Sciences to increase spending for research and development to more than 3 percent of the nation's GDP, and pointed out that basic research develops into important scientific discoveries that might not have been anticipated at the time of the discovery.

Examples given were cameras originally developed for astronomers that are now used in heart surgery; imaging technology used by astronomers that has been redeveloped for use in diagnosis of breast cancer; and a synchrotron light source project that is expected to yield energy breakthroughs in nano-structured photovoltaic cells and solid state electronics, and also have impacts in other disciplines such as medicine, environmental sciences, and national security.

MIT graduate student Lauren Culver explained the importance of long-range science research funding to students who are contemplating careers in science. "Some students leave school prematurely because funding for their research is not available," she said. "America's young people will rise to the challenge of discovering solutions to problems, if given the opportunity."

A highlight of the event included presentation of the George E. Brown, Jr., Award by SETWG to Rep. David Obey (D-Wisc.), Chair of the House Appropriations Committee. Obey was honored for his efforts to increase science R&D budgets throughout the year, including his role in passage of the historic American Recovery & Reinvestment Act of February and the surprising robust R&D budgets for the fiscal year 2009 omnibus bill enacted in early March.

SPIE is the international optics and photonics society founded in 1955 to advance light-based technologies. Serving more than 188,000 constituents from 138 countries, the Society advances emerging technologies through interdisciplinary information exchange, continuing education, publications, patent precedent, and career and professional growth. SPIE annually organizes and sponsors approximately 25 major technical forums, exhibitions, and education programs in North America, Europe, Asia, and the South Pacific. In 2008, the Society provided more than \$1.9 million in support of scholarships, grants, and other education programs around the world. For more information, visit SPIE.org.



SPIE volunteers were among science, engineering, and technology advocates who visited Congressional offices last week to urge strong support for research funding. From left: (front) Charles Baumgartner, Alessandro Gandelli, Anastasios Maurudis, SPIE Fellow and President Elect Ralph James, Marc Himel, Greg Schuckman, Joerg Woerner; (back) Luca Pilenga, SPIE Fellow Bob Breault, Kristen Carlson Maitland, Dawn Munson, Silvia Mioc, Larry Shiller, Tanya Kosc.

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