

Public and Governmental Affairs Committee: A Vital Connection to Science Policy Decision Makers

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It is with great pleasure that I write this society perspective as incoming Public and Governmental Affairs (P&GA) chair. This committee has become quite energized over the past few years and I'm excited to continue that momentum and expand my volunteer service to the TMS membership.

First, some background on the committee: The P&GA Committee is a collection of committed volunteers with an interest in science policy. This group has been very active under the leadership of the past chair, Kevin Hemker, from Johns Hopkins University. Activities have included organizing briefing sessions for Capitol Hill staffers covering topics such as the emergence of Integrated Computational Materials Engineering, coordinating TMS Congressional Visit Days each spring, selecting Congressional and Materials Genome Initiative (MGI) Fellows, and developing and managing the Wired to Washington policy advocacy tool on the TMS website.

Next, some information on my background as the new P&GA Committee chair: Science policy is something that I am deeply passionate about. When I had the opportunity to serve as the 2009–2010 Congressional Fellow (cosponsored by TMS) I jumped at the chance to participate and learn the legislative process hands on. As the Fellow, I was a member of U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown's legisla-

tive staff in Washington, D.C. It was a career-changing experience and I learned a tremendous amount about what it takes to legislate in the Congress. As I transitioned from that position to my current position in industry at EWI, I have continued to apply the lessons learned as a staffer on communicating technical content effectively to broad audiences. My vision for becoming P&GA chair is to apply those skills and talents to bring as many TMS members as possible into the process of informing public policy.

My passion for this effort stems from recognition that societal problems are becoming ever more complex and there is a growing need for technical expertise to provide unbiased, informed commentary to support policy makers. Engineers and scientists are routinely ranked at the top of lists of admired professions, and yet our impact on the policy making process is quite humble compared to other professionals. It hasn't always been this way. Giants of materials science like Edward Orton, Jr., drove the creation of the National Research Council during World War I. At the outset of World War II, Vannevar Bush famously delivered the plan for the National Defense Research Committee to Franklin Roosevelt on a single sheet of paper that Roosevelt approved in 15 minutes signing: "OK – FDR."

Today, materials and materials-manufacturing topics are at the forefront of the national agenda in a way that they haven't been in a generation. Legislation including a renewal of the America Competes Act, the National Network for Manufacturing Innovation, and a whole host of

research-funding programs will all be discussed in this Congress. TMS is poised to make a strong contribution to the national discussion. And with the help of P&GA committee member Arnie Thomas, we are developing a new, more robust framework to engage TMS to develop advocacy topics.

If you'd like to join the discussion as a member of the P&GA Committee, contact TMS staff liaison Mary Samsa at msamsa@tms.org and she will guide you to the next steps. For TMS members at large, there are many ways to get involved, as well. Apply for next year's Congressional Fellowship. Send a letter to your Senators and Representatives using the online Wired to Washington tool on the TMS website: www.tms.org/PGA/PGAw2w.aspx. Better yet, suggest a letter topic to be included on the website. You can also join us in Washington, D.C., for the 2013 Congressional Visit Days.

As chair of this highly energized committee, my vision is to act as a translator between the technical experts in TMS and policy experts across the country. I'll use my influence and experience to provide guidance for a robust and growing cadre of TMS members interested in providing their expertise to influence policy. This is an exciting time for the policies and politics of minerals, metals, and materials engineering and I look forward to making a robust and lasting contribution to TMS.

Ed Herderick is Director, Additive Manufacturing Consortium, EWI, Columbus Ohio; and chair of the TMS Public and Governmental Affairs Committee.