

Establishing an MRS Role in National Science Policy

It is with considerable excitement and pride that I look upon the increasing contributions being made by my MRS colleagues in the areas of international cooperation and national science policy. For now I want to focus on interactions in the area of U.S. national science policy in order to point out some recent MRS accomplishments as well as identify our philosophy in developing goals and plans for the future.

From the beginning of the Materials Science and Engineering (MS&E) study¹ in 1986, MRS was an active supporter of this important report through special forums, publications, articles, and demographic data. This support served both to develop input for the study and to publicize its results. MRS eventually published the National Research Council's report² on the four regional meetings held as a followup to the MS&E study. The results of these meetings helped establish a national implementation strategy for what has now become the President's FY 1993 Initiative in Advanced Materials and Processing (see March 1992 *MRS Bulletin*, p. 18-20). These actions contributed to the formation of federal public policies concerning materials by facilitating responsible technical discussion and the exchange of information.

MRS has nurtured relations with various technical societies and with the federal research leadership in areas of materials science and technology in other ways as well. MRS collaborated with seven other societies and served as lead organizer in the inaugural Materials Forum held in conjunction with the Solid-State Sciences Committee Meeting in Washington, DC in February last year. At our Fall Meeting, presidential science adviser D. Allan Bromley addressed the Society on the federal response to the MS&E Study, *A National Agenda in Materials Science and Engineering*. Through these activities MRS provided timely information on emerging public policy issues for its members and others in the materials community.

At present MRS supports the nucleus of a Washington office which facilitates inter-

actions with other Washington-based professional societies and also with executive branch agencies and congressional groups. Through this office we provided program assistance for the May 1991 Capitol Metals and Materials Forum and organized the July 1991 program for the Advanced Materials Caucus, a joint Senate/House group which meets periodically to discuss materials issues. These endeavors, and others aimed at providing reliable, unbiased technical and professional information on materials issues, are gaining MRS recognition as a resource serving the larger professional good in the national science policy arena.

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Most recently, MRS President Slade Cargill participated in a meeting (January 1992) of professional society presidents with presidential science adviser Allan Bromley. Slade and Past President Jim Roberto also met separately with Karl Erb, associate director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy to discuss MRS activities and national science and technology policy initiatives. As a result of these discussions, MRS will hold an Advanced Materials Initiative Forum at the 1992 MRS Spring Meeting. Members and attendees will learn—directly from the various federal agencies involved—about the details of the new federal plans in advanced materials and processing.

We have many people to thank for all these accomplishments, including our MRS presidents, the External Affairs Committee (headed by past chair, Kathy Taylor, and current chair, Gordon Pike), the Public Affairs Subcommittee (chaired by Elton Kaufmann, who led efforts to establish our Washington office), Bill Appleton for his special role in developing the NRC's final

report on implementing the MS&E study, and the dedicated MRS professional staff and consultants. Dr. Bromley's warm remarks regarding the contributions of the Materials Research Society to the progress and maturation of this field attest to the effectiveness of these contributions.

Given the rapid changes taking place and the expanding role in which MRS finds itself, the Society is laying the foundation to more formally identify its objectives and overall goals within the national science policy arena. It is timely that we examine this area from a broad perspective, and input from the membership will be most welcome. The role we pursue must not be a narrow one, and it is certainly not the role of a self-interested lobbyist. Clearly, much broader objectives based on nourishing the development of science policy for the benefit of all people—and based on involving the knowledgeable, effective, responsible participation of our membership in such policy evolution—come closer to the principles we need to establish. There is a continuing need for timely, unbiased technical and professional information on and understanding of emerging public policy issues, and for effective communication between policy makers and scientists and engineers. Also, the Materials Research Society must work productively along with other professional societies as a team player in making its contributions.

Our early beginnings are promising, and they encourage us to continue. For the future, we must define and sustain a clear vision of MRS's role in materials-related science policy. With dedication and energy we can continue to make valuable contributions to the national science policy arena.

Tom Picraux

1. *Materials Science and Engineering for the 1990s* (National Academy Press, Washington, DC, USA, 1989).
2. *A National Agenda in Materials Science & Engineering: Implementing the MS&E Report* (MRS, Pittsburgh, PA, USA, 1991). □

In this month's "Letter from the President," MRS First Vice President and President-Elect S. Thomas Picraux offers some thoughts on MRS's role in materials-related science policy. Picraux is manager of the Semiconductor Physics Department at Sandia National Laboratories.