

PUBLIC AFFAIRS FORUM

An analysis of public policy issues and how they affect MRS members and the materials community...

MRS Voices Concern over DOE's Restricted Travel Funds for Researchers

The Department of Energy (DOE) has restricted travel money for its scientists. Because many members of the Materials Research Society (MRS) work in DOE laboratories, the MRS Public Affairs

Committee voted to voice the Society's concern to DOE. In June, MRS President Harry Atwater sent a letter to Secretary of Energy William Richardson, with a copy sent to the White House. Neal

Lane, Assistant to the President for Science and Technology, replied. The letter exchange is presented in this month's PUBLIC AFFAIRS FORUM.

June 7, 2000

Mr. William Richardson
Secretary of Energy
Forrestal Building, Room 7A-257
1000 Independence Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Secretary Richardson:

The Materials Research Society (MRS) is concerned that recently imposed travel restrictions on Department of Energy researchers will have a long-term effect on the research environment in DOE national labs and in the broad research community. Participation by DOE researchers in scientific and technical meetings is an effective, primary means to exchange timely information. It is our Society's position that, to be fully successful, DOE researchers must have open scientific exchange, including travel to conferences.

Data from our Society show that DOE attendance at national meetings is 30%–40% lower than Fiscal Year 1999 levels. MRS came into existence because of the crying need for interaction sought by the scientific community, and this need still exists. Normally, DOE researchers not only enrich our meetings scientifically but also play a large role in the governance of the Society. These important activities include setting the scientific program of our meetings, editorial control of our publications, public outreach, and interactions with student programs; much of this work is done at national meetings. The DOE labs have been notable in the past by promoting full participation by lab scientists in Society activities.

Open scientific exchange at conferences is vital to the scientific process. To restrict DOE workers in their scientific mission is not in the national interest. Conferences offer a cost-effective channel of communication for researchers because they create opportunities to interact with many other researchers at once. Indeed the American taxpayer receives full value for their research dollar only if DOE researchers are fully engaged with the scientific community through conference participation.

The Materials Research Society strongly encourages you to support normalization of open scientific exchanges by DOE researchers.

Sincerely,
Harry Atwater, President
Materials Research Society

August 2, 2000

Mr. Harry Atwater
President
Materials Research Society
506 Keystone Drive
Warrendale, PA 15086-7573

Dear Mr. Atwater:

The Administration and I share the concern of the Materials Research Society that the statutory cap Congress imposed on Department of Energy (DOE) contractor travel in FY 2000 will have an adverse long-term effect on research programs in the DOE national laboratories and also in the broad research community. This was one of several serious problems with the FY 2000 Energy and Water Development Appropriations Bill that the Administration strongly objected to. Unfortunately, Congress did not heed our objections and the House has ignored them again in the Energy and Water Development Appropriations Bill and also in other FY 2001 appropriations bills it has recently passed. I reiterate what I said in my remarks at the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Annual R&D Colloquium: "There's a lot of work to be done if we want a good R&D budget at the end of this appropriations cycle. Each of you needs to become deeply involved in this effort. If allowed to proceed unchecked, Congress could stall our progress toward national goals and toward balance in the healthy R&D portfolio precisely at the moment in history when we can best afford to invest in America's future."

I appreciate your concern and support.

Sincerely,

Neal Lane
Assistant to the President
for Science and Technology