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U.S. National Academies Call for Change in Visa Policy for Non-U.S. Scientists

The federal government must revise current visa restrictions for non-U.S. scientists, engineers, and qualified students if the United States is to maintain the vitality and quality of its research, said the presidents of the U.S. National Academies (NAS) in a statement issued on December 13, 2002.

"Recent efforts by our government to constrain the flow of international visitors in the name of national security are having serious unintended consequences for American science, engineering, and medicine," they said. "We ask the Department of State and its consular officials to recognize that, in addition to their paramount responsibility to deny visas to potential terrorists, the long-term security of the United States depends on admitting scholars who benefit our nation."

In their statement, the presidents—Bruce Alberts (National Academy of Sciences), William A. Wulf (National Academy of Engineering), and Harvey Fineberg (Institute of Medicine)—reported, "The list of those who have been prevented from entering the United States includes scholars asked to speak at major conferences, distinguished professors invited to teach at our universities, and even foreign associates of our Academies. It includes research collaborators for U.S. laboratories whose absence not only halts projects, but also compromises commitments made in long-standing international cooperative agreements.... Perhaps most seriously, the list also includes large numbers of outstanding young graduate and postdoctoral students who contribute in many ways to the U.S. research enterprise and our economy."

The statement offers suggestions for revising the policy that would include reinstating a procedure of presecurity clearance for scientists and engineers with the proper credentials, instituting a visa category for established scientists and engineers, and involving the U.S. scientific and technical community in determining areas of particular security concern.

The full statement can be viewed on the Web site at www.nationalacademies.org.

U.S. Energy Secretary Establishes Task Force on the Future of Science Programs at DOE

Last December, Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham named Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) President Charles M. Vest to head a high-level Task Force on the Future of Science Programs at the Department of Energy (DOE). The

task force will examine science and technology programs across the department and consider future priorities for scientific research.

The task force will operate as a subcommittee of the Secretary of Energy Advisory Board (SEAB), the highest external advisory board in the department. The task force will present its final report to SEAB next summer. The SEAB was chartered in 1990 to provide the Secretary with timely, balanced, independent advice on the department's laboratory operations, science, energy and national security policy issues, and other topics as directed by the Secretary.

In addition to president of MIT, Vest is a member of the university's Mechanical Engineering faculty. He serves on the U.S. President's Committee of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST) and is vice chair of the Council on Competitiveness. He is former chair of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Advisory Committee on the Redesign of the Space Station and the Association of American Universities.

Other members of the task force include John Baldeschwieler, Johnson Professor and Professor Emeritus, Department of Chemistry, California Institute of Technology; Alfred Berkeley III, Vice Chair, NASDAQ; Robert Birgeneau, President, University of Toronto; James Duderstadt, President Emeritus, University of Michigan; M.R.C. Greenwood, Chancellor, University of California, Santa Cruz; Ray Irani, Chair, Occidental Petroleum; Steve Koonin, Provost, California Institute of Technology; Leon Lederman, Director Emeritus, Illinois Math & Science Academy; William Martin, Chair, Washington Policy & Analysis Inc.; M. Peter McPherson, President, Michigan State University and Chair, Secretary of Energy Advisory Board; Steve Papermaster, Chair, Powershift Ventures; and Deborah Wince-Smith, President, Council on Competitiveness.

U.S. Energy Secretary Ends 2002 with New Appointments

Last December, Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham announced that Kyle McSlarrow, formerly chief of staff for the department, has been sworn in as Deputy Secretary of Energy. The Senate confirmed McSlarrow in mid-November. Abraham appointed his Deputy Chief of Staff and Counselor, Joseph P. McMonigle, as the new Chief of Staff at the Department of Energy (DOE), replacing McSlarrow's vacated office. For the position of Associate Deputy Secretary of Energy for DOE, Abraham appointed Randa Hudome.

Abraham said, "Kyle's [McSlarrow] new role will allow the department to tap into his extraordinary management and policy skills, focusing them on the array of energy, science, environmental, and homeland security issues facing the department. I am confident the department will benefit from Kyle's legal and policy expertise as well as his knowledge of and ability to work closely with members of Congress on key issues."

As Deputy Secretary, McSlarrow serves as the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of DOE, an agency with over 100,000 federal and contractor employees, 17 national laboratories, and a budget of \$22 billion. He exercises policy and programmatic oversight over a diverse agency that includes the nuclear-weapons complex, nonproliferation programs, a \$7 billion environmental cleanup program, and a research and development portfolio that includes high-energy physics and the development of advanced technology to strengthen the U.S. energy program and homeland security.

As Chief of Staff, McMonigle plays a major role in the implementation and strategic planning of the Secretary's policy initiatives across the department. He provides advice to the Secretary on a broad range of topics including international affairs, budget and legal issues, and departmental management. He also serves as one of the Secretary's primary liaisons to the White House, other Cabinet agencies, and Capitol Hill.

Regarding his appointment of Hudome as Associate Deputy Secretary of Energy, Abraham said, "As my senior policy advisor on international affairs, I have relied on Randa's insight, experience, and intelligence. Her keen understanding of international affairs enabled her to contribute in a meaningful way to the administration's energy policy. I am extremely pleased to announce her promotion to Associate Deputy Secretary."

In her new position, Hudome will continue her work on international affairs for the Secretary as well as for Deputy Secretary of Energy McSlarrow.

South Caucasus-U.S. Scientific Workshop Addressed Electronic Materials

Last November, the U.S. Civilian Research and Development Foundation (CRDF) held a workshop on nontraditional materials for electronics as part of its South Caucasus-U.S. Scientific Workshops Program, which is funded by the U.S. National Science Foundation. The workshop, hosted by the Institute of Radio-physics and Electronics of the Armenian

Academy of Sciences, was held in Yerevan, Armenia. The CRDF program staff or representatives in the Caucasus countries have been working with workshop participants to identify appropriate sources of support for follow-on proposals to the CRDF, the National Science Foundation, and other funding agencies.

Participants addressed utilization problems of wide-bandgap semiconductors and conducting polymers in electronics. Led by Robert Vardanyan of the Armenian National Academy of Sciences Institute of Radiophysics and Electronics and Pirouz Pirouz of Case Western Reserve University, the 11 Armenian and U.S. researchers gathered November 3-10 to discuss the latest developments and to identify possibilities for future collaborations in diamond-based wide-bandgap semiconductors and organic crystals and polymers research.

At the end of the workshop, the participants agreed to collaborate on the development of electronic devices using single-crystal synthetic diamonds. The researchers will also carry out further collaborative research on the synthesis of photoactive polymers and the enhancement of solar cells. Proposals will be submitted for funding to the CRDF and to other funding organizations.

Azerbaijan's Independent Grant-Making Science Foundation Launched

Last Spring, with the encouragement of the U.S. Civilian Research & Development Foundation (CRDF) and the Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan, the Ministry of Justice of Azerbaijan officially registered the Azerbaijan National Science Foundation (ANSF) to offer funding support for the Azerbaijani scientific community on a competitive basis. On October 8, 2002, the ANSF received a start-up award of \$50,000 from CRDF to develop its infrastructure and begin operations. Located in Baku, the ANSF is a private nonprofit organization operating in accordance with the Civil Code and Constitution of Azerbaijan. The ANSF goal is to develop the Azerbaijani scientific-engineering community's potential through support of research and development projects on a competitive, merit-driven basis.

Funding for CRDF activities in Azerbaijan, including the ANSF, comes from the U.S. Department of State (DOS) as part of a DOS program of scientific and technical assistance to Azerbaijan.

For more information about the ANSF and its programs, contact ANSF staff at mushtagovf@aznetmail.com or Siri Oswald, CRDF Headquarters, at azerbaijan@crdf.org.

Portugal Makes Progress on R&D Spending

The provisional results of the 2001 biannual update to Portugal's scientific research and development (R&D) statistics, announced last November, show a sharp rise in the level of private sector investment in research since the last report in 1999. The figures produced by the country's Science and Technology Observatory show that, since 1999, the increase in research spending by Portuguese business corresponds to an annual growth rate of 28%. This increase has raised the private sector's contribution to total national R&D spending to 32%, up from 23% two years earlier, but still some way below the European Union (EU) average.

Human resources within the private sector were also strengthened by a 17.4% rise in the number of full-time researchers in the same two-year period.

Within educational institutes and private not-for-profit organizations, which together are the source of 46% of Portugal's total annual R&D funding, annual investment growth has slowed considerably to levels of 4% and 3%, respectively.

Public investment in research has fallen by 6% since 1999, and the levels of human resources in the public sector have stagnated with a slight growth in the number of researchers over the two-year period.

When these results are compared with figures for the EU as a whole, it is evident that Portuguese rates of growth in research expenditure and human resources are higher than the EU averages at 7% and 6%, respectively. However, with total research spending at 0.83% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) compared with the EU average of 1.9%, Portugal has a long way to go to catch up, and even more must be done to try and meet the Lisbon goal of 3% by 2010.

The gap is less wide in terms of human resources, given Portugal's overall growth rate of 6% per year in this area. If such growth can be maintained, the gap between the national figure of 3.4 researchers per thousand individuals and the EU average of 5.3 per thousand should continue to close.

For further information on Portugal's R&D spending, access Web site www.oct.mct.pt.

Australia Announces Research Priorities

Last December, the Minister for Education, Science, and Training, Brendan Nelson, and the Minister for Science, Peter McGauran, welcomed the announcement by the Prime Minister of Australia on na-

tional research priorities: an environmentally sustainable Australia, promoting and maintaining good health, frontier technologies for building and transforming Australian industries, and safeguarding Australia.

"The four national research priorities set a clear and coherent direction for Australian research," Nelson said. "Science is now at the center of government policy-making, acknowledging the vital contribution that scientific achievements can make to the quality of all our lives."

The Government's decision was informed by advice from an Expert Advisory Committee of distinguished Australian researchers and business leaders.

"The next step is implementing the priorities and I know how committed the research agencies and funding bodies are to seize this opportunity to realize Australia's national research agenda," McGauran said.

The priorities will be applied to Commonwealth research and research funding bodies and competitive research programs for public sector research and, at this stage, will not include industry programs and university block grants.

The Government will continue to draw heavily on advice from Australian scientists and researchers, adding to their current input to the new Sustainable Environment Committee of Cabinet, and the Prime Minister's Science, Engineering, and Innovation Committee (PMSEIC), both chaired by the Prime Minister.

EREC Conference Will Address Renewable Energy Sources for Islands

The European Renewable Energy Council (EREC) is organizing a conference on renewable energy sources for islands, tourism, and water desalination in Crete, Greece, on May 26-28, 2003. The conference is aimed at experts and decision-makers, government representatives, representatives from international agencies and programs; energy agencies; universities, research, and technical institutes; and others. For further information, contact the EREC Conference Secretariat, Renewable Energy House, 26, rue du Trône, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium; tel. 32-2-546-1933; fax 32-2-546-1934; or e-mail erec@erec-renewables.org.

Lithuania Launches FP6

The Lithuanian Sixth Framework Programme (FP6) launch event will take place in Vilnius on February 24, 2003. Lithuania's Minister for Science and Education will open the event. Additional speakers will include representatives

from the European Commission, CORDIS (Community Research & Development Information Service), and previous project participants. For further information, contact Neringa Kranauskiene at tel. 370-5-2-644-715 or e-mail n.kranauskiene@ktl.mii.lt, or access Web site www.tpa.lt. □

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