

Communicating with Policymakers

The Materials Research Society has the mission of promoting communication about materials, and it is easy to see many of the ways in which we do that. Our meetings and publications offer excellent means of providing for technical communication among our members, but the Society has a role of communicating the interests of materials researchers to policymakers, and vice versa.

Society officers, staff, and members of the Public Affairs Committee can often be found in Washington, D.C., visiting congressional representatives and senators to explain why increased investment in materials research is essential to the nation's (and the world's) economy. We have a growing network on Capitol Hill that helps us have an impact there. MRS (jointly with the Optical Society of America) sponsors a Congressional Fellow each year, placing a scientific professional in the office of a senator or representative to provide advice on scientific matters and support in drafting technically related legislation. The Congressional Fellows have a great history of providing MRS leaders with contacts and insights that have allowed us to make a relevant impact in return for a relatively modest investment.

We are also helped by various other



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Alex King

Our message in Washington is very simple and resoundingly consistent: Investment in materials research (in particular) and the physical sciences (in general) is good for the country. We try to reinforce the related messages that come from other groups and scientific societies and also from the federal science agencies, and we express support for specific legislative initiatives that promote materials research in the public or corporate arena. Congress is sympathetic to supporting research in health-related areas, so we take pains to point out that most breakthroughs in fighting disease start with technologies developed in the physical sciences.

MRS has a natural focus on policymakers in Washington, but we are very conscious that about 35% of our members come from outside the United States, so we are increasingly engaged in efforts elsewhere, too. The International Union of Materials Research Societies (IUMRS) has our support in its production of *Facets*, a publication directed at policymakers worldwide, and we are collaborating with European-MRS in creating a Materials Science Forum on Future Sustainable Technologies, also directed at policymakers, that is scheduled to be held in Augsburg, Germany, in September of this year.

How can you help? Many ways. Add your voice to ours by writing to your representatives in support of the science budget during the budget-writing phase of the governmental calendar. Sign up for our e-mail alerts about emerging legislative issues related to science, so you can make your opinion known in a timely manner. Invite your representative to visit your laboratory, and explain how you are serving the public needs. Provide short lay abstracts of success stories that can be related to governmental representatives: They love good stories, as well as being given the opportunity to take some credit for them! And if you are invited to your nation's seat of government to talk about science, let us know, so we can coordinate our efforts to maximize the impact. The sidebar offers Web site sources that provide information on the various activities listed.

MRS is becoming increasingly effective at representing your professional interests, in Washington and elsewhere, and with your help, we will do even better in the coming months and years.

ALEX KING
2002 MRS President

contacts who act as our "eyes and ears" in Washington. These include ASTRA (the Alliance for Science and Technology Research in America), FMS (the Federation of Materials Societies), and our own Washington consultant. These help us to maximize our impact on congressional actions by ensuring that our visits, calls, and messages to Washington are well-timed, targeted, and focused.

We routinely invite federal science agency staff and directors to our Spring and Fall Meetings, along with specific policy-oriented individuals as new programs appropriate for MRS members come under consideration. Even an occasional elected official has attended our meetings.

It is very hard to measure the effect of our efforts in promoting materials research, although it is gratifying to hear that MRS is regarded by many as the primary voice for materials research on Capitol Hill, and is increasingly recognized without the need of any introduction. The collective efforts of MRS and others in 2001 certainly helped to produce significant improvements in the fiscal year 2002 budget for the physical sciences over President Bush's initial request.

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MRS Web Sources

MRS Public Affairs Committee
www.mrs.org/pa/

MRS/OSA Congressional Fellowship
www.mrs.org/pa/fellowship/

Effective Communication with Congress and the White House
www.mrs.org/pa/communication/

MRS Public Affairs E-mail Alerts
www.mrs.org/pa/

International Web Sources

International Union of Materials Research Societies
www.iumrs.org/

IUMRS *Facets*
www.iumrs.org/facets.html

European-MRS Materials Science Forum on Future Sustainable Technologies
www.amu-augsburg.de/matforum/