

From the Director—Visit to Washington DC

On March 13, I had the honor, along with Persis Drell (SLAC Lab Director), Thom Mason (ORNL Lab Director), and Congresswoman Anna Eshoo, of meeting with the Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, in her Capitol Hill office. This was one meeting in a full day during which Persis and I also met with House Science Committee Chairman Bart Gordon and also with staffers in Senator Dianne Feinstein's office. We then went on to meet with House Appropriations Committee members, Congresswoman Barbara Lee and Congressman Mike Honda. In all the meetings, we discussed the importance of funding for fundamental research in the physical sciences and strategies for supporting the America Competes funding levels for science.

The idea of the meeting with the Speaker grew out of a conversation in December with Persis Drell shortly after the Omnibus budget was passed. Director Drell then met with Congresswoman Anna Eshoo, who has been a strong supporter of science generally and SLAC in particular, in early January. She agreed to help set up a meeting with the Speaker in early March.

The message we delivered to the Speaker and in our other conversations was simple. We wanted to thank the Speaker for her support of basic research. We know she understands how important basic research in the physical sciences is to the national, economic and energy security of our nation. We urged consideration of supplemental funding in FY08 that would include increases to science; we felt this would be a critical factor in sending a strong positive signal that the promise of the America Competes Authorization Bill is becoming a reality. We also urged that supplemental funding in FY08 could help build momentum for FY09 as we feel FY09 is a critical year for America Competes to take hold.

We explicitly told the Speaker that we three Directors of major research institutions were not asking for anything for our individual laboratories. Our message was that a broad national commitment to scientific research and innovation was necessary ; such a commitment would certainly create an environment in which we, and our partners in the academic community, can compete and thrive.

Like Director Drell, I will continue to press for funding for science in any venue I can find. I believe that there is pressing need for basic research in the physical sciences both to deliver some of the transformative solutions needed to address the challenges facing our nation today and to train the next generations of scientists who will discover those transformative solutions in the future. While mission driven research is also extremely important, history has repeatedly shown that radical solutions often come out of fundamental basic research. It is also important to always acknowledge that we do some fundamental research just to understand...and many times that is justification enough.