

## What's Happening in Congress, and What Can We Do About It?

*Jean E. Taylor*

In my multiple roles as a member of JPBM, the AMS Committee on Science Policy, the Board of Directors of AAAS, and the AMS representative to the recent AAAS Affiliates meeting in Washington, I have been deluged with a great deal of information about what's going on in Congress. Things are really changing. Members of the staff of the House Science Committee speak in terms of war and revolution. Other longtime observers of Congress qualify this by saying it isn't a revolution on, for example, the scale of the Great Depression or World War II, but it is still very significant.

I've come to believe that adequate support of science is in real danger. Leaders of both parties in Congress voice strong support for science and mathematics. But even so, when there is severe budget cutting pressure it is difficult for them to "put their money where their mouth is." The

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AAAS analysis of the budget resolution shows that, in constant dollars (that is, accounting for inflation), support for science would decrease by 33% by 2002; even NSF, which fares among the best, would decrease by 18%.

In addition, there are a great many new members of Congress, and many of them do not know very much about science and mathematics, or why it is an investment instead of an entitlement, or what the federal government's role is and should be. Many of them do not support science even to the extent that their leaders do.

So what should you do? EVERYONE who has been informing us (Republican or Democrat, in Congress or representatives of funding agencies, or whatever) has advocated that we WRITE to our own representatives and senators and MEET with them when they are in their home districts (this is more effective than going to Washington, as well as simpler).

Everyone has also emphasized that the purpose should be to inform, and that the effort should be long-term. Nevertheless, people fear a "train wreck" in October when it comes to the final parts of budget passing and reconciliation with other legislation, so there is no time like the present to get this long-term relationship started.

So what do you say? They say you should organize your letter into three paragraphs: In the first paragraph, state your reason for writing and your "credentials." (You want to inform him or her of the importance of federal support of science in your district or state, and you are a math-

ematician at XY institution who is a constituent of his or hers.)

In the second paragraph, state your position with supporting evidence. Although it may be tough, the advice is to avoid emotionalism—stick to the facts. Try not to come across as arrogant (don't imply you think the recipient is stupid not to understand the importance of supporting mathematics and science), or as if you ought to have summer salary (that's a separate issue, between the scientific community and funding agencies like NSF). Rather, let her/him/them know how important NSF and other federal support for the mathematical sciences is to YOUR INSTITUTION and YOUR STATE, and use examples. If you are funded by NSF or another agency, talk about your project(s)

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and its impact on your institution or the field. If not, talk about how NSF funds enable your department to participate in important scientific work, educate its students, etc. (Yes, it would be much simpler if I wrote a sample paragraph here for you, but I'm told that it is MUCH more effective if each person writing a letter writes it individually. If this seems daunting, what is most important is writing at all; make your first letter short and promise to write more later—and keep the promise.)

In your third paragraph, request (not demand) a specific action, such as a vote for or against a bill; if you don't have a bill number at hand, do not let that stop you—just be as specific as you can.

Address it to The Honorable ..., U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20510 (or U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20515), and use a salutation such as Dear Senator / Congressman / Congresswoman ...

This has been fairly brief, in the hopes that you will read it and that it will get you moving. For further information, send email to [jpbm@math.umd.edu](mailto:jpbm@math.umd.edu). But the important thing is to write now. Members of Congress must hear from their constituents about the value of federal programs before they will support them.

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