

# My Trip to the Hill

*Sastry G. Pantula*

I go to Washington D.C. four or five times a year, whether it be for American Statistical Association (ASA) board meetings at the nice new ASA building or for National Science Foundation (NSF) panels or a National Institute of Statistical Sciences (NISS) affiliates meeting. So why did I decide to go to D.C. during the week of April 17th and 18th [2007] again? My wife, Sobha, thinks it was because her brother's family and sister were in town. The primary reasons for my trip, however, were to meet the senators and the congressmen from the great state of North Carolina and to request additional funding for mathematical and statistical sciences. This was my second year in a row to go on such a mission. While things are fresh in my mind, I thought I would write down some of my experiences and see if some of these may be of interest to you.

## **How Was It Organized?**

This trip was an organized effort by the Committee on Science Policy (CSP) of the American Mathematical Society (AMS). Attendees included CSP members and heads of several mathematics and statistics departments. Attendees are expected to meet with their congressional representatives and/or their staff members to convince them that mathematical sciences are important for our country to remain competitive and innovative, that funding the NSF and the Department of Energy (DOE) is important for the mathematical and statistical community, and, finally, to request their support for increasing funding for these agencies during the next budget cycle. Once the list of participants for

---

*Sastry G. Pantula is professor and head of the Statistics Department at North Carolina State University. His email address is pantula@stat.ncsu.edu.*

*This article first appeared in the June 2007 issue of Amstat News, the membership magazine of the American Statistical Association. Reprinted with permission.*

the trip is finalized, a list of elected officials from their districts is prepared. Sam Rankin, associate executive director of the AMS, and his right-hand person, Anita Benjamin, deserve much of the credit for all of the meetings they set up with the staff of congressional representatives from different states. One entire day was set aside to meet with the staff of our congressmen and senators. The day before the visits was set aside for the CSP meeting, which included a discussion of the current funding situation, followed by a discussion of etiquette and what to expect during the meetings with the congressional representatives the following day.

## **Funding Situation**

On April 17 the meeting started after lunch with brief introductions and some general CSP business items. Then the Division of Mathematical Sciences (DMS) director, Peter March from the NSF, discussed past, present, and future DMS funding in various categories, including research, interdisciplinary activities, work force programs, and the institutes. From his presentation my understanding is that the median annualized award size in mathematical and statistical sciences is about US\$55,000 and about 30% of the submitted proposals were funded during fiscal year 2006 (FY06). (As one of the previous program officers mentioned, "NSF has a strict policy of not funding the proposals that are not submitted to them.") The number of senior personnel and undergraduate students supported by the DMS has been increasing steadily during the past five years. We should be excited that the NSF Strategic Plan for FY06-11 includes as one of its five bullets "Advance fundamental research in computational science and engineering, and in fundamental, applied and interdisciplinary mathematics and statistics". My understanding is that the FY07 continuing resolution yielded a 3.1% increase for the DMS budget and that the

FY08 budget request for the DMS is for US\$223.5 million (an 8.6% increase). A key initiative in the FY08 budget request is “Cyber-enabled Discovery and Innovation (CDI)”. CDI is a foundation-wide initiative that promises to develop “a new generation of computationally based discovery concepts and tools to deal with complex, data-rich, and interacting systems.” This should be particularly relevant to statisticians and mathematicians working with massive data and knowledge extraction. Various ideas are being discussed at present for the FY09 budget that will help us be competitive and a leader in innovation.

Kei Koizumi, director of the R&D Budget Policy Program of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), gave a presentation on FY08 budget priorities. His presentation to the AMS and other presentations are available at <http://www.aaas.org/spp/rd/present.htm>. My understanding from his presentation is that the overall trend in R&D funding in constant dollars has decreased since FY05 and is projected to continue to decrease. However, there may be some good news for mathematical sciences in the budget requests for DARPA,<sup>1</sup> NSF-DMS, DOE-Advanced Scientific Computing Program, and the NIH, NIGMS, and NIBIB.<sup>2</sup> Jim Glimm, the president of the AMS, spoke about “the mathematics of information-driven science” as a good follow-up discussion to CDI initiatives.

### What to Expect the Next Day

Jim Turner, chief counsel for the House Committee on Science & Technology, gave a humorous presentation about the Hill and the recent power shifts. He has twenty-five years of experience on the Hill and is very knowledgeable about how things work in D.C. He also shared a document, “Measuring the Moment: Innovation, National Security, and Economic Competitiveness” (see <http://futureofinnovation.org/slides/>). I enjoyed his presentation last year as well.

Sam Rankin gave an excellent presentation about the etiquette for our meetings with the legislative assistants of our representatives. He emphasized the importance of being on time, being succinct in our 15-minute presentations to staff members, and talking about the importance of funding to mathematical sciences through anecdotes/examples specific to our state and to our districts. He also emphasized that we not be negative about party politics in our meetings and that we realize that both parties are supportive of funding for mathematical sciences as a way to remain competitive and innovative. (In my case, the two senators from North Carolina are

<sup>1</sup>*Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency.*

<sup>2</sup>*National Institutes of Health, National Institute of General Medical Sciences, National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering.*

Republicans, and the congressmen we met are Democrats.) He also discussed the logistics and distributed a packet that we would leave with the staffers at the end of each of our meetings. The packet had a sheet describing our requests, data on NSF funding to our state, and several very nice glossy Math Moments sheets (<http://www.ams.org/ams/mathmoments.html>).

At 6:00 p.m. it was time for a social hour. The best “panel discussions” certainly happened during this hour, and everyone had their favorite suggestion for Peter March and some congressional staffers! I have promised that these discussions will be kept confidential.

Then it was time for a working dinner. The keynote dinner speaker was David Weinreich, legislative assistant for the office of Congressman Bob Etheridge (D-NC) and a former AMS Congressional Fellow. David has a Ph.D. in mathematics, taught for a few years, and worked as an AAAS/NSF Science & Technology Policy Fellow at the NSF. He gave us a primer on how to lobby. His presentation started with a nice picture of a lobby where the “lobbying” may have originated. He emphasized knowing our member, knowing our message, and knowing the process. It is important to convey the message passionately and to educate (not “teach”) the staffer/member. He also mentioned leaving a sheet with “the ask” (= what we came to request) and not forgetting to thank the staffer/member for his or her valuable time. Finally, he emphasized that it is important to follow up with the same message by email and to make opportunities to meet again in the state/district to follow up on the message. The presentation was entertaining, and we all called it a night after some nice dessert.

### The “Pitch” Day

We started off at 7:30 a.m. with a breakfast meeting with Congressman Jerry McNerney (a Ph.D. mathematician) from California. He talked briefly about how he got elected and his strong interest in environmental issues. I had an opportunity with him to practice my speech for the rest of the day and to request his support for “the ask”:

- Support an FY 2008 budget of at least US\$6.43 billion for the NSF and a DMS budget of at least US\$223.47 million.

- Support an FY 2008 budget of US\$4.4 billion for the Office of Science of the DOE and at least US\$340.2 million for the Mathematical, Information, and Computational Sciences Program.

It was a very pleasant breakfast! It was then time to say good-bye to our colleagues from other states and for North Carolina’s delegation (head of our math department, a CSP member who is from our math department, and me) to meet our senators and congressmen. (Last year we had a larger delegation, which included faculty from UNC-Chapel

Hill, Duke, and Appalachian State in addition to the three of us.)

We met a staff member, Pat, from Senator Dole's office first. After introductions, we indicated that we were there to request the senator's support for mathematical sciences. We had our message clear and crisp. We gave a couple of examples of how mathematical sciences are useful for making our country competitive and innovative. We got a good chuckle when we mentioned that mathematics and statistics are the language and the key for advancing science, just as staff members are the key for advancing any bill. We indicated that the state of North Carolina received over US\$750 million over the past five years and that NC State ranks fourth and sixth in total and federally financed R&D expenditures respectively in the mathematical sciences. We talked about how NSF-VIGRE support helps residents of North Carolina as well as increases the work force of well-trained critical thinkers and problem solvers. We thanked Pat and, as we walked to Senator Burr's office, congratulated each other for having a successful first meeting. We had a very good meeting with John from Senator Burr's office and played the same tape from our earlier meeting. John also gave us some good suggestions about how we could be involved with an upcoming conference in North Carolina regarding NSF opportunities.

After lunch we went to Congressman Etheridge's office. We were very pleasantly surprised that we got to meet the congressman himself, along with his staff member, Pat. As we started to make our pitch, he indicated that we were preaching to the choir and that he is proud of all of the research and innovation at NC State and other universities in North Carolina. He talked about some of the budget items he had already supported for research during these difficult budget years. He gave us a full fifteen minutes before heading out to a Homeland Security meeting. Finally, we met a legislative assistant, Catherine, from Congressman Price's office. She also gave her full attention to us and asked a number of questions related to mathematical sciences. We had a pleasant chat recalling Congressman Price's picture on a Wheaties box from SAMSI [Statistical and Applied Mathematical Sciences Institute] opening ceremonies and his visit to our department announcing our second VIGRE grant a few years ago. As Sam Rankin mentioned in his presentation, both congressmen and senators overall are supportive of basic research and STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics] education. It was time to head back to Raleigh.

### **Some Concluding Thoughts**

I have certainly enjoyed my visits to the Hill the last two years. Is it worth it? I think it is. My understanding from the staffers is that it is very

important to do this and that educating them on a regular basis about our profession does make a difference. One of the staffers mentioned that "this is a slow process like moving the football inch by inch." According to the staffers, some of the societies are very organized and make their efforts multiple times during a given year. It is important for us to be at the table when decisions are being made. Federal funding is very important for our profession, and as many of you are aware, grant funding has been an expectation in academia. However, it is clearly not an entitlement, but a long-term investment in our future.

ASA's Science Policy Task Force and the Committee on Federally Funded Research have been very active in these areas already. Also, the ASA board has recently approved a recommendation from the Science Policy Task Force to create a new science policy position at ASA. I look forward to seeing the U.S. rise above any gathering storm and remain competitive and innovative in this flat world.

The AMS Washington office is happy to help mathematicians set up meetings with members of Congress, either in Washington or in their home districts. The office may be contacted at [amsdc@ams.org](mailto:amsdc@ams.org). The next meeting of the AMS Committee on Science Policy will take place in Washington, D.C., March 6-8, 2008. For more information on the activities of the AMS Washington office, visit the webpage <http://www.ams.org/government>.