

Congressional and Agency Visits in May 2011

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One of the little-known facts about our Society is that the leadership is actively involved in influencing federal legislation, policies, and budget items at both the congressional and agency level. Twice a year—once in the spring and again in the fall—the Health Physics Society (HPS) president, president-elect, congressional/agency relations liaison, and executive secretary and Capitol Associates conduct multiday visits to Senate and House staffers and appropriators, as well as to the relevant agencies, like the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Science and Technology Policy, Department of Energy (DOE), and Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

Our purpose in doing so is to influence policies, rulemaking, and legislation that is important to the membership and our profession. This past May, Kathy Pryor, Rich Vetter, Brett Burk, David Connolly, and yours truly continued that tradition by meeting with majority and minority staffers, appropriators, and key committee and subcommittee staffers. This time we met with staffers from the Senate Energy Committee, Senate Environment Committee, House Energy and Commerce Committee, and Senate and House Energy and Water Appropriations Subcommittees.

On the agency side, we focused one entire day with the NRC. We were fortunate to meet and speak with three of the five commissioners (Commissioners Kristine Svinicki, William Magwood, and William Ostendorff) and several of the Commission's key senior staff.

Our messages were common whether we were meeting with staff "on the Hill" or with NRC. Our first priority was to ensure that funding for fellowships and grants to students was preserved and possibly increased.

Our second priority was to preserve funding for the DOE Office of Science Low Dose Radiation Research Program. We heard from both sides of the aisle that both FY2011 and 2012 appropriations for these programs could be reduced; "Low Dose" was rumored to be cut by one-half! We made our case with the committee

members and appropriators that both these programs are more important than ever in the aftermath of the Fukushima accident and that the health physics manpower in this country will be stretched to meet the workforce demands from Japan, as well as to fill the attrition losses in the U.S. workforce. We found

that there was bipartisan support for our pleas, but the current congressional mood is to reduce budgets in both fiscal years. We also found that constituent support for programs is more important than at any time in recent memory. The point we made about the importance of "low dose" research was that the lessons that have been learned or will be learned with Fukushima—including dose trip points for evacuation, KI distribu-

tion, and shelter-in-place orders—are all predicated on better understanding of low-dose effects and associated cancer risks.

Time will only tell if our efforts will be successful in sparing these programs from the Office of Management and Budget budget cutters.

Our visit to the NRC is always delightful and enlightening. The commissioners and staff were particularly interested in our take on the Fukushima accident and its impact on emergency planning for the U.S. reactor fleet. We also shared positions with them on the proposed 10 CFR Part 61 ("Low-Level Radioactive Waste Management") revisions, Patient Release Criteria, Spent Fuel, and the Medical Isotopes Bill (S-99). Clearly, Fukushima was on the "front burner" for NRC and most of the Senate and House staff. The NRC was in a data-gathering mode with the Fukushima accident and was taking a very deliberate and introspective approach on how the Fukushima accident will impact rulemaking regarding the U.S. reactor fleet. In contrast to the Congress, where "knee jerk" responses and quick fixes are more common, the NRC's approach is more measured, fact-based, and pragmatic. Everyone was not looking forward to the budget "wars" that were looming for the next two months. Stay tuned for more! ☒



Left to right, Brett Burk, Kathy Pryor, Ed Maher, and Rich Vetter