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## SPIE volunteers deliver science R&D and education support message to Congress

11 April 2011



*Volunteers on the SPIE Congressional Visits Day team traveled to Washington, D.C., to talk about support for science research and education.*

BELLINGHAM, Washington, USA -- SPIE volunteers traveled to Washington, D.C., last week to express support for funding federal research and development programs and to discuss the important economic impacts of such programs.

The SPIE team were among more than 270 scientists, engineers and business leaders who made visits to their representatives' and senators' offices on Capitol Hill as part of the sixteenth annual Congressional Visits Day (CVD) sponsored by the Science-Engineering-Technology (SET) Work Group on 6-7 April (<http://www.aboutastra.org/cvd/>).

Volunteers on the SPIE team and the states they represented included:

- SPIE Fellow Robert Breault (Arizona)
- SPIE Student Member Dan Christensen (New York)
- SPIE President-Elect and Fellow Eustace Dereniak (Arizona)
- SPIE Student Member Hadiyah-Nicole Green (Alabama)
- SPIE Past President and Fellow James Harrington (New Jersey)
- SPIE Fellow Marc Himel (North Carolina)
- SPIE Fellow Robert Lieberman, chair of the Society's Engineering Science and Technology Policy Committee (California)
- SPIE Member Christopher Middlebrook (Michigan)
- SPIE Director and Fellow Jim Oschmann (Colorado)
- Perry Sofferan, Chief Strategy Officer and General Counsel for Tower Optical Cooperation (Florida)
- Jim Stein (Virginia), Vice President of Government Affairs for SPIE Corporate Member SCHOTT North America. Stein also staffed an informational booth at an exhibition held during the event at the Rayburn House Office Building.

At the 34 congressional offices they visited, SPIE team members discussed the importance of the nation's broad portfolio of investments in science, engineering and technology to promoting our country's prosperity and innovation. They spoke about the need for:

- sustained, long-term funding for research and technology development programs such as the America COMPETES Act of 2010
- support for programs to improve science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education in the nation's schools

- support for bills aiming to secure U.S. supplies of rare-earth elements needed in applications ranging from automobiles and computers to security devices and solid-state lighting
- reform of export control regulations, to remove barriers to U.S. trade, create jobs and strengthen the nation's leadership in technology.

"We were honored to participate in the 16th annual SET-CVD," said Himel, senior technologist at Tessera. "This afforded us the opportunity to stress the importance of maintaining and extending our nation's competitiveness through increased prioritization of scientific research and STEM education, reform of our export control system, and access to rare earth elements.

Himel said that the diversity among the SPIE team -- scientists and engineers from academia and industry, from graduate students to experienced professionals -- showed that these issues "are important not just today but for our long-term future."

Christensen, a graduate student at the Institute of Optics University of Rochester Medical Center, said that participating in CVD provided him with an opportunity to "make a difference."

"Personally communicating with our elected officials and their staff is one of the greatest opportunities we are afforded as individuals to make a singular significant impact," he said. "Our government is fundamentally constructed to act in response to the voice of the people. As a member of our society and having been so richly blessed with much education and experience, it is my duty and obligation to be a part of that American voice."

Christensen said that the projected outcomes of all of the programs mentioned in the SPIE talking points have an impact on him and other young professionals in academia as well as those hoping to make careers in industry. "Without continued federal support in each of these areas, the future I have to look forward to as an American scientist and citizen is unsettling."

"As a first time participant in Congressional Visits Day, I came to engage in something new in support of science and technology for the optics and photonics industry at large." said Oschmann, Vice President and General Manager at Ball Aerospace & Technologies Corp. "I left with renewed interest in the issues that impact such a large range of our society -- from interesting the future generations in science and engineering, to appropriate government support for R&D in an effort to strike a balance in these difficult economic times. I look forward to supporting these efforts in the future and believe they make a difference."

A highlight of the event was the presentation of the George E. Brown Award for outstanding leadership in support of Federal R&D to Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-Texas) and Rep. Daniel Lipinski (D-Illinois). The awards were presented during an evening reception at the Rayburn House Office Building.

CVD participants had a breakfast meeting with Rep. Paul Tonko (D-New York) and Rep. Chaka Fattah (D-Pennsylvania) before making hundreds of visits to offices of their Senators and Representatives.

The SET Work Group is an information network comprising professional, scientific, and engineering societies, institutions of higher learning, and trade associations, representing more than one million researchers and professions in science and engineering concerned about the future vitality of the U.S. science, mathematics, and engineering enterprise.

[SPIE](#), the international society for optics and photonics, was founded in 1955 to advance light-based technologies. Serving more than 180,000 constituents from 168 countries, the Society advances emerging technologies through interdisciplinary information exchange, continuing education, publications, patent precedent and career and professional growth. SPIE annually organizes and sponsors approximately 25 major technical forums, exhibitions and education programs in North America, Europe, Asia and the South Pacific, and supports scholarships, grants and other education programs around the world.



*From left, Eustace Dereniak, Robert Breault, and Dan Christensen stop between office visits for a photo with the Capitol.*



*Marc Himel, left, and Robert Lieberman prepare for a day of visiting congressional offices.*



*Christopher Middlebrook and Hadiyah-Nicole Green participate in a CVD briefing.*



*Perry Sofferman, left, and James Harrington review notes on their way to visit congressional offices.*



*Jim Stein demonstrates optical technology at an exhibit held during a CVD evening reception.*



*From left, Perry Sofferman, Jim Oschmann, and Christopher Middlebrook pause between visits to House and Senate offices.*



*Approximately 270 volunteers represented scientific organizations during SET-CVD day.*



*Rep. Daniel Lipinski (D-Illinois), at left with SPIE President-Elect Eustace Dereaniak, was one of two winners of the Gordon E. Brown, Jr., Award.*



*Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-Texas) is congratulated on winning the Gordon E. Brown, Jr., Award by SPIE President-Elect Eustace Dereaniak.*

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