

MIT Washington Office

The mission of the MIT Washington Office, established within the Office of the President in 1991, is to support the advocacy activities of the president in Washington and to represent the Institute in Washington as one of the nation's premier research universities. The office contributes to a steady flow of information between MIT and the federal government. Staff members gather and disseminate information on a daily basis to the MIT campus concerning government activities and actions. The staff also make available the Institute's talent and research knowledge to federal officials, facilitating meetings and discussions for them with Congress, the executive branch, and other national organizations, with a particular focus on the leading federal research and development (R&D) agencies. The office maintains liaison with the offices of the Massachusetts congressional delegation, other congressional offices, congressional committees, and executive branch agencies and departments.

Advocacy Coalitions and Working Groups

The director, assistant director, and senior legislative assistant are engaged in the activities of the major organizations and coalitions, particularly higher education organizations, that work in support of federal investment in university research and education. These groups provide support for a common R&D, education, and science agenda supported by MIT, and require participation in frequent meetings.

The MIT Washington Office provided leadership on key committees of the Association of American Universities (AAU), the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC), and the Science Coalition on innovation in authorizing legislation, science policy, higher education, and medical research. The assistant director led the Coalition for National Security Research and served on the executive committee for a major reorganization of the Science Coalition. Other groups with which the office is engaged include the following:

- AAU Council on Federal Relations
- Ad Hoc Group for Medical Research
- American Council on Education
- Coalition for National Science Funding
- Coalition for Plasma Science
- Council on Competitiveness
- Council on Government Relations
- Energy Sciences Coalition
- Fusion Energy Sciences Day
- NASULGC Council on Governmental Affairs
- National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities

New England Council
Science, Engineering, and Technology Working Group
Space Grant Day

Increasing MIT's Policy Role

Expanded MIT Congressional Testimony. Approximately 15 MIT faculty testified before Congress—including the Senate Commerce and Science, House Science, House Energy, Senate Energy, House Natural Resources, and Senate Environment committees—with support and assistance from the MIT Washington Office. Because of the MIT Energy Initiative, energy issues were the main focus of faculty testimony.

Innovation Discussion Group. In cooperation with the Woodrow Wilson Center, the office also organized a policy working group of 30 Washington-based governmental and organization policy officials that meets monthly for policy forums with leading thinkers in this field to discuss and work on innovation policy issues.

MIT Public Policy Course. The Washington Office worked with a graduate student committee to respond to the growing student interest in science and technology policy at the federal level. The director taught two intense, four-day, 15-plus-hour seminars at MIT, one during January's Independent Activities Period and another in April, each with 25 MIT graduate students. Students called the seminars "S&T Public Policy Boot Camp."

MIT Student Lobbying Day in Washington. For the second year, the office has engaged MIT students as advocates with members of Congress and their staffs. As part of the Science, Engineering, and Technology Working Group's Congressional Visits Day, 16 students visited the Massachusetts congressional delegation in Washington in March. The office sponsored a mini-course in effective lobbying and helped the students prepare convincing fact sheets, data, and personal stories concerning the importance of federal science funding.

MIT Summer Intern Programs. Some 15 to 20 undergraduates and Technology and Policy Program students work as interns in various government agencies and in Congress each summer. The MIT Washington Office worked closely with these programs to set up evening meetings with science policy leaders from government, one to two days per week throughout June and July. The students who participated last summer met a "who's who" of DC policy leaders, from the chief justice of the Supreme Court to the president's science advisor. The office also organized a version of the aforementioned public policy course for them this summer.

Weekly Legislative Report. Since this spring, the office has prepared 4-6 page weekly legislative status reports to keep MIT senior leadership informed about ongoing legislative developments in areas important to MIT's future.

Support for Energy Policy Studies. Aside from the office's work to build an outreach program to Congress for the MIT Energy Initiative, MIT's coal and geothermal reports

have enabled MIT to play a major role in national energy policy this year. However, there are no new major energy policy reports in MIT's pipeline, despite the central role of the MIT Energy Initiative on campus, MIT's history of playing a national role in major policy questions, and the potential benefits further energy policy work can provide the nation. The office has successfully worked to find foundation funding support for a major new MIT study of how climate change cap-and-trade legislation could be optimally designed. In addition, with our office's extensive involvement, a foundation proposal has been submitted for a major MIT study of alternative new energy technologies and how innovation in that field could be accelerated.

Legislative Initiatives

The office continues to collaborate with colleagues at MIT and in national organizations to respond to a continuing series of policy proposals designed to strengthen the partnership between research universities and the federal government. These activities continue to span issues related to the flow of foreign students and scholars into the United States, which has been the subject of immigration legislation, as well as matters related to the conduct and management of federally sponsored research. Of note during the past year has been the daily engagement of the Institute's leadership and this office, along with the wider higher education community, in the issues of support for the physical sciences and engineering, the general competitiveness of the US research and development infrastructure, higher education and related tax legislation, and support for life science research. The current Congress has been much more active than recent Congresses, presenting both major opportunities — particularly for R&D funding — and potential problems for research universities. This has required a significant increase in the level of MIT's legislative engagement. In addition, the MIT Energy Initiative has led to a major involvement this year in energy policy and legislation, which this office has supported through a major congressional outreach effort utilizing MIT faculty and researchers.

The office has spent a significant amount of time contributing to four areas:

- Furthering the Innovation and Competitiveness Agenda, including major authorizing and appropriations legislative proposals from the administration, Senate, and House to increase federal R&D spending and support for science, mathematics, and engineering education.
- Supporting the MIT Energy Policy Initiative, including creating an extensive outreach program in Washington to increase awareness of MIT energy research and policy reports such as *The Future of Coal* and *The Future of Geothermal Energy*. Faculty groups came from campus to participate in energy policy forums at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Senate Energy Committee, and the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, and numerous faculty members testified about energy issues before congressional committees on energy policy.
- Expanding the capacity of MIT to engage our major federal R&D agencies by helping the vice president for research and associate provost to build campus faculty groups focused on engagement with MIT's leading federal R&D support

agencies, including the National Institutes of Health, the Department of Defense, the Department of Energy (DOE) and its Office of Science, and NASA. This initiative is new this year.

- Fostering MIT's involvement with the Department of Education and congressional education and finance committees in developing and improving higher education-related policies and legislation. Proposed legislative changes in this area may present major problems for MIT's tuition and endowment systems.

Significant contributions to the work of the office continue to be made by the president, the vice president for research and associate provost, the director of government and community relations, the director of the office of sponsored research, the general counsel, numerous lab directors, and the international scholars and students offices. Working collaboratively with our office as a team, MIT officials continue to pursue critical national policy and legislative outcomes in a wide range of policy areas, from overall agency R&D appropriations to student-aid funding and international student visas.

Lincoln Laboratory, the Plasma Science and Fusion Center, and the Laboratory for Nuclear Science

Lincoln Laboratory, the Plasma Science and Fusion Center, and the Laboratory for Nuclear Science are among MIT's largest research entities. In terms of federal research support, they are among the most vulnerable to abrupt shifts in funding priorities. The Washington Office director and assistant director continued to accompany the vice president for research and associate provost and faculty, directors, and senior staff from these entities on visits to key executive and congressional offices. The objectives were to brief key staff on current activities, policy and funding needs, and the accomplishments of these entities.

MIT Congressional Staff Seminar on Science and Technology

In 1993, with the financial support of the Sloan Foundation, MIT began an annual seminar for senior congressional staff on science and technology issues. Each year, the president invites staff leaders of key committees and congressional offices, government departments, and related policy groups to attend an intensive two-day seminar with senior MIT faculty and presenters from industry and other universities. In recent years, the format has expanded to include senior executive branch and relevant government department staff. Participants suggest topics for future seminars. Professors Eugene Skolnikoff, and Steve Ansolabehere and vice president for research and associate provost Claude Canizares direct the program. On April 11–13, 2007, some 30 senior congressional staff and senior career staff of the executive branch attended the 12th seminar on "Tiny Technologies: Nanotechnology and its Applications." Professor Subra Suresh led the planning committee, working with professors Skolnikoff and Ansolabehere. The Washington Office again identified invitees, made travel arrangements, and served as program staff throughout the seminar.

Outreach by Senior MIT Officials to Congress and the Executive Branch

The director continued to accompany the president and the vice president for research and associate provost on regular visits to senior officials of executive branch agencies, members of Congress, and their staffs.

Personnel

The MIT Washington Office is led by director William B. Bonvillian, who reports to the president. Office staff include assistant director Jason Van Wey, administrative assistant Helen Haislmaier, and Kari McCarron, who joined the team as a senior legislative assistant in July 2006, adding significantly to the ability of the office to serve the Institute.

William B. Bonvillian
Director

More information about the MIT Washington Office can be found at <http://web.mit.edu/dc/>.