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Chief of Majority Staff for Science Committee Offers Views on Upcoming S&T Issues

Earlier this month, David Goldston, Chief of Majority Staff for the House Science Committee, offered his views on several issues of interest to the physical sciences community. They included:

FUSION/ITER FUNDING:

Goldston commented that some in the fusion community see U.S. expenditures for ITER (estimated to be \$1 billion+) as being in addition to the current level of funding for DOE's fusion energy sciences program. "That's just not affordable," Goldston said. DOE is correct in prioritizing future fusion research, he stated. Goldston emphasized that the fusion community must agree on how research funding should be shifted to accommodate ITER. The U.S. should not commit to ITER funding without a clear strategy as to how to pay for it, he said, adding, "I don't see some big bump-in in Office of Science funding." The Fusion Energy Sciences Advisory Committee will play a major role in reaching a consensus about the dimensions of the future program.

Goldston's words reiterate those that his boss, House Science Committee Chairman Sherwood Boehlert (R-NY), made on the House floor in May during consideration of the FY 2006 funding bill for the Office of Science (see <http://www.aip.org/fyi/2005/077.html>.) Boehlert told his colleagues: "But the fusion community and apparently the appropriators seem to be saying that the domestic fusion program has to be held harmless for ITER to move forward. That's simply not realistic, and we cannot move forward with ITER with that presumption. So we need to decide before we commit to ITER whether we're willing to make the necessary sacrifices to pay for it." He later said, "I will do all I can to prevent the U.S. from entering into an agreement if no one is willing to make the sacrifices necessary to pay for it."

Echoing his chairman, Goldston concluded his remarks by calling for the prioritization of future research. "If not, we will try and kill that project," he warned.

NASA:

Goldston is confident that differences between the House and Senate versions of the NASA reauthorization bill can be resolved (see <http://www.aip.org/fyi/2005/113.html>).

Regarding the Administration's vision for NASA to return man to the moon, send manned missions to Mars, and beyond, Goldston commented that it is "this [plan] or nothing." He said that the main issue will be timing.

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FUTURE FUNDING FOR SCIENCE:

Previous double digit increases in some science budgets should not be expected in the near future, Goldston said. He contends that funding increases covering inflation will be seen as a pretty good outcome. One indicator to watch is the extent to which science funding is treated the same as other areas of the budget. A "good signal" will be increases above that prevailing level.

CLIMATE CHANGE LEGISLATION:

Legislation limiting green house gases will occur in the longer-term, with action to be expected first in the Senate, Goldston predicted.

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