

MAA Letter to Congressman Boehlert

After consultation with the the MAA President and the chair of the MAA Science Policy Committee, Tina Straley, MAA Executive Director, sent a letter to Congressman Boehlert about a proposal before the House Science Committee. The text of the letter is quoted below.

May 9, 2006

The Honorable Sherwood Boehlert
Chairman, House Science Committee
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Boehlert:

On behalf of the Mathematical Association of America (MAA), I applaud your committees recently introduced legislation on competitiveness and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education. As you know, STEM education is the most critical building block in the structure of our nations international economic competitiveness. Furthermore, MAA, as the largest association in America representing undergraduate mathematics educators, believes that undergraduate education is the most important part of the STEM education enterprise. For this reason, the MAA endorses increased support for NSF programs in the Division of Undergraduate Education.

In particular, MAA supports the bills provisions which would enhance and enlarge the Robert Noyce Scholarship Program and the STEM Talent Expansion Program (STEP) within the National Science Foundation (NSF). These are effective programs which address the nations needs in terms of attracting more students into STEM fields at the undergraduate level, particularly minority students.

Of course, quantity is not the only issue in play when it comes to undergraduate STEM education. MAA is also deeply committed to improving the quality of undergraduate education, which is why we also support the provisions which would establish the Centers for Undergraduate Education in Science, Mathematics and Engineering. These Centers would create incentives for departments of science, mathematics and engineering at universities to take a hard and thoughtful look at how they educate their undergraduates.

Undergraduate institutions are also tasked with the preparation of our Nations STEM teachers, a responsibility on which MAA places great importance. MAA supports the bills provisions which would refocus NSF's Math-Science Partnerships program as a teacher training program.

MAA does have some reservations about the bill, however. Primarily, we are concerned at the lack of overall authorized funding numbers for NSF or its major components. MAA believes that this omission may lead to the aforementioned new program and program expansions becoming "carve-outs" within the NSF budget. MAA certainly believes that these programs should grow, but other NSF programs should not suffer as a result. Additionally,

MAA hopes that these improvements will not come at the expense of research in the mathematical sciences. While our primary mission is undergraduate education, we recognize that the challenges of tomorrow cannot be met using yesterdays mathematics. If we are to make our students truly competitive, research will be needed to develop new mathematics geared towards the interdisciplinary science problems of this new era.

MAA reiterates its support for your legislation and hopes to continue to work with you and your staff on these issues. Please contact me if MAA can be of any help to you moving forward.

Sincerely,

Tina H. Straley, Ph.D. Executive Director