

## **Volunteers Urge Congressional Action on Photonics Partnerships, Higher Education**

*SPIE and other NPI volunteers visited Congressional offices last week to urge support for specifying optics and photonics technologies in reauthorization of legislation encouraging public-private partnerships, and for reauthorization of the Higher Education Act including photonics vocational objectives. The actions would help ensure that jobs and talent stay in the USA, encourage new technology development and revenue sources, and foster development of a capable workforce for the future.*

WASHINGTON, DC, and BELLINGHAM, Washington, USA ([PRWEB](#)) September 14, 2015 -- Volunteers supported by [SPIE, the international society for optics and photonics](#), joined other scientists, researchers, engineers, and industry professionals in visiting US Congressional offices in Washington, DC, last week to urge support for measures to strengthen America's ability to compete in the world photonics industry.

The SPIE Congressional Visits Day (CVD) team, along with other [National Photonics Initiative](#) (NPI) volunteers, visited offices of representatives and senators from more than a dozen states. SPIE is a Founding Sponsor of the NPI.

In particular, volunteers representing photonics urged support for:

- Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, including private-public optics and photonics vocational objectives within existing Department of Education community college initiatives. Doing so will enable a national and geographically diverse vocational optics and photonics model to grow and help meet demands for a trained US photonics workforce.
- Complete reauthorization of the America Creating Opportunities to Meaningfully Promote Excellence in Technology (America COMPETES) Act, including language to encourage partnerships in optics and photonics science and technology among the federal government, industry, and academia. The House of Representatives has passed its version of a reauthorization bill, but the bill does not authorize desired funding levels for non-government R&D agencies and does not include language that would focus private and public investments in critical optics and photonics technologies.
- Encouragement of a Congressional resolution recognizing 2015 as the [International Year of Light and Light-based Technologies](#), in concert with the United Nations observance underway this year.

The first challenge volunteers met in discussing NPI goals and the International Year of Light with Congressional staffers was “defining photonics and optics beyond eyeglasses and microscopes,” said Jeremy Bos, a professor at the Michigan Technological University. While well-versed in other fields, “most staffers have no technical background and had no idea of the broad impact of optics and photonics in our lives.”

Volunteers play a vital role in making “photonics champions” out of staffers, representatives, and senators, Bos said. “Congressional staffers are very busy. They meet with delegations like ours continually over the day. They take careful notes and ask intelligent questions. However, to really grab their attention you need to tell a story that is specific to their state or district. Having this narrative is crucial.”

The timing of the visits was particularly effective, said Jim McNally, chair of the SPIE Engineering, Science,

and Technology Policy (ESTeP) committee and a Fellow of the society.

“The fact that our NPI advocacy activities on the Hill occurred during the International Year of Light, which has brought great world-wide recognition to the vital role that photonics plays in our modern world, has enhanced our message,” McNally said. “We focused on raising awareness among our policy leaders and decision-makers about the critical importance of light-based sciences and technologies to US global competitiveness and in significantly improving quality of life. We emphasized the importance of passing a new COMPETES Act to send a clear signal internationally that the US recognizes the importance of photonics as a critical economic driver and competitive force for American industry.”

Volunteers on the SPIE CVD team and the regions they represented included:

- SPIE Board of Directors member and Fellow Anita Mahadevan-Jansen, Tennessee
- Jeremy Bos, Michigan
- SPIE ESTeP committee chair and Fellow Jim McNally, New Mexico
- Kimberly Arcand, Massachusetts and Rhode Island
- SPIE Fellow Lahsen Assoufid, Illinois
- Michael Williams, Delaware
- Michelle Stock, Michigan
- Mono Merino Livingston, New Mexico and Arizona
- SPIE President-Elect and Fellow Robert Lieberman, California
- SPIE Industry and Market Analyst Steve Anderson, Maryland
- Steven Dulmes, Illinois and Wisconsin.

## About the NPI

The [NPI](#) is a collaborative alliance among industry, academia and government seeking to raise awareness of photonics and the impact of photonics on our everyday lives; increase cooperation and coordination to advance photonics-driven fields; and drive US funding and investment in areas of photonics critical to maintaining US economic competitiveness and national security. The initiative is led by a coalition of scientific societies, including SPIE, the international society for optics and photonics, and the American Physical Society, the IEEE Photonics Society, the Laser Institute of America, and The Optical Society.

## About SPIE

SPIE is the international society for optics and photonics, an educational not-for-profit organization founded in 1955 to advance light-based science and technology. The Society serves nearly 264,000 constituents from approximately 166 countries, offering conferences and their published proceedings, continuing education, books, journals, and the SPIE Digital Library in support of interdisciplinary information exchange, professional networking, and patent precedent. SPIE provided more than \$4 million in support of education and outreach programs in 2014. SPIE is a Founding Partner of the International Year of Light and Light-based Technologies and a Founding Sponsor of the US National Photonics Initiative. [www.spie.org](http://www.spie.org)



**Contact Information**

**Amy Nelson, Public Relations Manager**

SPIE

<http://spie.org>

+1 (360) 685-5478

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