Committee on Chemistry and Public Affairs

Oral Report to Council

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Madame President and Members of the Council,

The Committee on Chemistry and Public Affairs (CCPA) is responsible for providing ACS with advice and recommendations for action on public policy matters that impact the chemical enterprise. In addition, CCPA works to motivate and support ACS member participation in government affairs at both the federal and state levels, encouraging members to visit policymakers in Washington and their home districts, and to contact their legislators through the Act4Chemistry Legislative Action Network.

In my written report, I shared a few of the legislative highlights accomplished in 2014 through the combined efforts of the ACS Office of Public Affairs and ACS members. This morning I would like to share another example of the power of ACS member engagement.

Each year, to celebrate National Chemistry Week, ACS seeks official proclamations from federal, state, and local policymakers. In 2014, Senator Chris Coons, a democrat from Delaware, agreed to sponsor the resolution in the United States Senate as he has done several times in the past. Senator Coons comes from a family of chemists, has a strong relationship with the ACS Delaware local section, and often uses the occasion of National Chemistry Week to speak on the senate floor about how chemistry improves people’s lives.

However, ACS wanted to make the Senate resolution a bipartisan effort, which meant finding a republican cosponsor. Anyone who follows the news knows that bipartisan cooperation is in short supply on Capitol Hill, and even this innocuous request ran into partisan roadblocks. In fact, the ACS request was turned down by several Republican senators who had sponsored similar resolutions in the past. Then, ACS members came to the rescue. A number of our members from Pennsylvania contacted their republican Senator, Pat Toomey, and urged him to cosponsor the resolution. There’s a saying that all politics is local. Well, by putting the power of constituent support behind the ACS request, Senator Toomey reversed his position and agreed to become the republican sponsor for the resolution which was subsequently passed by the Senate.

Now, I understand that the National Chemistry Week resolution is not the weightiest matter before the U.S. Senate. However, the door that ACS members opened by contacting Senator Toomey’s office has remained open for ACS staff, who continue to work with the Senator on other issues important to the chemistry enterprise. And, the extra effort invested by ACS members to ensure that the resolution had bipartisan sponsorship helps underscore a larger point – that science is an issue where both parties can come together. My hat goes off to the ACS members from Pennsylvania, particularly from the Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Lehigh local sections, who persuaded their Senator to champion the National Chemistry Week resolution. Let this be an inspiration to us all.

Madame President, this concludes my report.