

Democratic Forum Takes Up Apollo-Style Economic Program

by Rochelle Ascher

A standing-room-only crowd of more than 500 people, including many Congressmen who returned to Washington, D.C. early to attend, participated Jan. 19 in a follow-up forum on the “Innovation Agenda,” first presented by House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi in a speech at Harvard University on Dec. 2. The forum, held in the Cannon Caucus Room, was titled “A Commitment to Competitiveness To Keep America Number 1,” and followed the much-publicized joint House-Senate Democratic event devoted to exposing Republican corruption.

In her invitation to the event, Pelosi had struck the key theme: “In answering John F. Kennedy’s bold call to put a man on the Moon, America unleashed unprecedented technological advances that built the world’s most vibrant economy. Through scientific discovery and innovation, America became number one in world economic competitiveness.” That is what the Democrats’ Innovation Agenda proposes to do once again.

Although the event was overshadowed by the raging political battle over the Alito nomination, the presentations on education, and research and development—the first two points of the five-point Innovation Agenda—showed the firm intention of the Democratic Congressional leadership to change course toward a real economic recovery.

An Educated Workforce

The event began with Congressman George Miller of California, House Democratic Policy Committee Chair and ranking Democrat on the House Education and Workforce Committee, who gave a brief overview of the Innovation Agenda’s five goals.

Congressmen Bart Gordon of Tennessee moderated the

first panel, which was devoted to the first goal, that of “creating an educated, skilled workforce in the vital areas of science, math, engineering, and information technology.” Gordon described the three pieces of legislation he introduced immediately after Pelosi’s Dec. 3 speech. The three bills are:

- HR 4434: 10,000 Teachers, 10 Million Minds Science and Math Scholarship Act, introduced Dec. 6, 2005.
- HR 4435: Establishing the Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy (ARPA-E), introduced Dec. 6, 2005.
- HR 4596: Sowing the Seeds Through Science and Engineering Research Act, introduced Dec. 16, 2005.

The bills were introduced after October hearings, and a report by the National Academy of Sciences, titled *Rising Above the Gathering Storm: Energizing and Employing America for a Brighter Economic Future*, which painted a grim picture of America’s ability to remain competitive without far-reaching new programs in education and research.

On Jan. 25, a bipartisan group of Senators, including Pete Domenici (R-N.M.), Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.), Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.), and Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.), held a press conference announcing the introduction of three companion Senate bills.

As Gordon’s bills elaborate, one major Democratic goal is to educate 100,000 new scientists, engineers, and mathematicians in the next four years by proposing a new initiative—in cooperation with states, businesses, and universities—to provide scholarships to qualified students who commit themselves to working in these fields. Another goal is to place a highly qualified teacher in every math and science K-12 classroom, by offering up-front tuition assistance to talented undergraduates, and by paying competitive salaries.



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A COMMITMENT TO COMPETITIVENESS TO KEEP AMERICA #1

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The Innovation Agenda is intended to foster today the kind of bold technological advances that JFK's Apollo program unleashed, stated House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (top left) in her invitation to the Jan. 19 meeting.

"Every American must think like a scientist," Rep. Rush Holt (bottom left) told the Jan. 19 meeting of the House Democrats' "Innovation Agenda," which discussed how to rejuvenate U.S. science and technology.

Two other presentations followed Gordon's: one by Dr. Belle Wei, dean at San Jose State University in California, one of only 15 women deans of engineering schools in the country, who spoke on the disastrous deficit of U.S. science and engineering graduates; and one by Rep. Mike Honda (D-Calif.), who spoke on nanotechnology.

Research and Development

The second topic on the first panel was devoted to the second Innovation Agenda goal, that of "investing in a sustained Federal research and development initiative that promotes public-private partnerships." Speaking were Dr. Neal Lane of Rice University, and Rep. Rush Holt (D-N.J.), a physicist who had worked at the Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory.

Holt's comments were the highlight of this meeting. He described science and innovation as "quintessentially American," citing the founding fathers and "Yankee ingenuity." For the first time, he said, our standard of living may be falling, and children today are living off investments from 30-40 years ago. He said we have to have a commitment in our gut to basic scientific research. "Every American should think like a scientist—that we have to think about how things work and how to make them better—that we have to have a revolution in how we think about things," Holt emphasized. He cited the commitment of Representatives Pelosi and Miller to holding

town meetings on the Innovation Agenda, noting his own town hall meetings with union leaders, businessmen, and elected officials, and he stressed that this commitment to invention and innovation is what is uniquely American.

The first panel concluded with a discussion of providing affordable broadband technology to all Americans, the third goal in the Innovation Agenda.

Then the second panel took up the questions of energy independence (unfortunately without mentioning the crucial energy source required: nuclear) and promoting opportunities for small business, the final two points of the Agenda. Although Rep. Jay Inslee (D-Wash.), who gave the Democratic message on the question of energy, led off his discussion of achieving energy independence by calling for a new Apollo project, and the revival of an "unlimited spirit of

innovation" like that of President Kennedy, the discussion went downhill from there. The panel on small business got stuck in the proposal to provide stock options to employees, rather than on tax credits and health care as crucial economic aids to small, high-technology firms.

The Path Forward

The commitment by Democrats to reversing and replacing the 40-year-long paradigm of anti-science, anti-technology, privatization, and so on, with a return to the "JFK Apollo model" represents an absolutely crucial shift in outlook, but two key elements uniquely supplied by Lyndon LaRouche are necessary. The first is that a successful economy requires a 50% expenditure devoted to infrastructure, which is only possible with an advanced machine-tool capability. The second is LaRouche's answer to the most frequently asked question, "But how do we pay for this?" which is in his most recent paper, "Deficits As Capital Gains: How To Capitalize a Recovery" (see *EIR*, Jan. 27, 2006).

In her concluding remarks, Pelosi noted the Democrats' desire to hold town meetings on the agenda, and mentioned that two members of Congress have already asked the leadership to host such meetings in their districts. Such a discussion among the population is indispensable to the success of this turn toward economic sanity.