May 2016

Dr. Rush Holt

Former Congressman, CEO, American Academy for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) and Executive Publisher of the journal "Science"

Over his long career**, Dr. Holt** has held positions as a teacher, scientist, administrator, and policymaker. From 1987 to 1998, Holt was assistant director of the Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory (PPPL), a Department of Energy national lab. This lab is the largest research facility of Princeton University and one of the largest alternative energy research facilities in the country. At PPPL, Holt helped establish the lab's nationally renowned science education program.

On Capitol Hill, Holt established a long track record of advocacy for federal investment in research and development, science education, and innovation. His legislative work earned him numerous accolades, including being named one of Scientific American magazine's "50 National Visionaries Contributing to a Brighter Technological Future" and a "Champion of Science" by the Science Coalition.

Holt is also a past recipient of two of AAAS' highest honors: the William D. Carey Lectureship Award (2005) and the Philip Hauge Abelson Award (2010).

Subject Area/Topic: THE INFLUENCE OF SCIENCE ON PUBLIC POLICY

Highlights: Dr. Holt first emphasized the importance of the scientific approach to issues by asking questions, evaluating evidence, and drawing conclusions from evidence that can be critiqued and verified by others. He noted that in recent years there seems to have been a decline in the appreciation of science and therefore the ability to evaluate scientific issues and problems.

Today people seem to be looking only for information that confirms their existing beliefs. Because of this greater focus on ideology rather than evidence, Dr. Holt thinks our political system has become less self-correcting.

Dr. Holt identified a number of public policy issues that would benefit from more thorough empirical analysis including climate change, antibiotic resistance, the teaching of evolution, and the use of food stamps. He also believes an evidence-based approach could be helpful with international diplomatic issues such as human rights.

In describing the work of AAAS, he emphasized that the organization does not do direct scientific research. Instead, it communicates to the public about the value of science and promotes science literacy and education. AAAS has 100,000 members about 20% of whom live outside the U.S. Physical scientists, social scientists, and engineers, as well as interested members of the public, are eligible for membership.