

# Oregon an inspiring place for science, NSF chief says

By Peter Cogswell  
Emerald Reporter

Few places are more inspiring in the world of science than Oregon, said Erich Bloch, Director of the National Science Foundation during a lecture in the EMU Gumwood room Thursday.

Bloch, who is the first director of the NSF to come out of industry as well as the first to be an engineer, spoke on the national science policy and investments in education and research.

The NSF is a federal agency involved in supporting basic research across all scientific and engineering disciplines, and in expanding the nation's supply of scientists, engineers and science educators.

Bloch began the lecture by noting the changes that have taken place in the science world in the last 25 years.

"The conduct of research has changed considerably in the last 25 years," Bloch said. "We (the U.S.) had an advantage then that we don't have now."

"In the past, there was a steady supply of foreign science talent coming into the United States, but now a scientific breakthrough is as likely to come in Europe or Japan as it is in the U.S.," he said.

This is good for science in some ways, though, because it keeps American scientists from becoming stale, Bloch said.

A trend in science that Bloch likes is the sharing of academic resources.

"Sharing resources and facilities is another way science has changed," Bloch said. "Use of shared equipment is a good thing. It provides more science and better science."

Industry participation is also a requirement for good science research and education, Bloch said.

"Industry and universities need to get closer together, and both will benefit," Bloch said.

"Research now is looked on as fueling economic growth," he said. "Intense economic competition is a fact of life."

On the educational level, there is a problem of dwindling numbers in science education that needs to be addressed as quickly as possible, Bloch said.



Erich Bloch

One reason for this problem is poor teaching on the high-school level.

"We need to raise the standards for high school teaching," he said. "Many freshmen come into college not planning to major in science because their high school science program was so poor."

"Oregon's young people are its greatest resource," he added. "What better way to compete in the future than to give them the tools to compete?"

To solve the problem of poor teaching on the elementary level, industry and academia must take a hand, Bloch said.

"Tomorrow's discoveries need investment today," he said. "These are long-term investments. Too many people look directly to tomorrow."

Doubling the budget of the NSF is the most pressing issue facing Bloch right now. He encouraged everyone in the audience to write their Congressmen and their local science foundations calling for an increase in the budget.

After his lecture, Bloch fielded questions from the audience, which ranged from pay concerns of teaching faculty to how best to recruit new faculty.

"You can make more money on Wall Street, but you could also end up in jail," Bloch said after it was pointed out to him that for a while bus drivers received higher pay wages than some researchers at the University.

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