

## Houghton Says Universities Must Take the Lead in Energy R&D

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Alfred, N.Y.--Global energy demand is expected to grow by 40 percent in the next 15 years. Despite this significant hike, U.S. government support for energy research and development and private sector research and development continues to fall off sharply. So who has the energy to meet these energy demands? "Clearly, universities have to pick up the slack," said U.S. Rep. Amory Houghton (R 31st District), who moderated "Energy Outlook Roundtable: 1998 and Beyond" Jan. 21 at Alfred University. The roundtable featured presentations by a number of area business leaders and state agency representatives. According to a report issued last fall by the Energy Research and Development Panel of the President's Committee of Advisors on Science and Technology, "there needs to be more public discussion and a growing public understanding of why energy itself--and therefore, energy R&D--is important to the welfare of our nation and the world." Apparently, that message isn't getting through to the movers and shakers in Washington, D.C., because the U.S. spends less on energy research and development than other developed countries, including Japan. Or maybe the message is getting through but it just isn't being understood. Houghton contends that there are few energy experts among our country's policy makers. "There are only a few business people, and no one from the energy industry, in Congress," said Houghton. "The Department of Energy doesn't let anyone with energy experience in because of conflict of interest concerns. That is why we have no energy policy." "I think the government does have an energy policy, but it's reactive, not proactive," said Syed N. Hoda, director of Surface Core Technology at Corning Inc. "Every time there is a crisis, we do something. When the crisis is over, we forget about it." Clearly, the people who attended Wednesday's roundtable at Alfred University were not ready to forget about it. Said L. David Pye, dean of the New York State College of Ceramics at AU: "Government, industry and academia must all be involved. We must create and disseminate knowledge, and if no one is willing to do it at the national level, we will do it here." Here is AU's Center for the Engineered Conservation of Energy (EnCo), which was established to "develop new energy-efficient technologies through a partnership involving academe, industry and federal and state governments," according to Director Robert Bitting. "EnCo brings together scientists and engineers from across the University. Scientists from industry and other universities will also be involved." Added Bitting: "Research leading to increased energy efficiency will have an extraordinary payoff. It will simultaneously save billions of dollars, reduce oil imports and trade deficits, cut local and regional air pollution, and cut emissions of carbon dioxide." "As we prepare for the new millennium, what is being done at Alfred University cuts right to the heart of being a successful nation," said Houghton. The business leaders who took part in the roundtable are also sold on the kind of research and development partnership that is the heart of Alfred's EnCo. Gerald Putman, senior vice president for economic development and public policy at NYSEG said his company is constantly looking for ways to develop and improve technology through partnerships. Said Dennis Weimer, president of Dresser Rand Energy Products Inc.: "People are not going to pay twice as much for their energy in order to be environmentally safe, so rather than subsidize or regulate, we must invest in research and development." Fuel cells, devices that convert fuel to electricity through a chemical reaction with air, have the potential to be a safe, efficient energy source in the near future, according to Hoda. "However, we must invest in research and development to bring the cost of fuel cells down," he explained. As a way to secure funds for research and development, Gene Bernstein, vice chairman of Northville Industries Inc., suggested that gasoline taxes be hiked. "It may also help reduce our dependency on foreign oil," said Bernstein, chairman of the AU Board of Trustees. Houghton agreed with Bernstein, but conceded a hike in the gasoline tax would face stiff opposition from lawmakers. "I would be the only one to vote for it," he said.