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Revitalizing Support for the Physical Sciences: The American Competitiveness Initiative

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In January 2006, during his *State of the Union Address*, President Bush announced a renewed commitment on the part of his Administration to funding math and science education, and science and engineering research. Two weeks later, in February 2006, the President submitted his budget request to Congress, including *The American Competitiveness Initiative* (ACI), a budget initiative that proposes to double federal investments in fundamental research in the physical sciences at three civilian science agencies—the Office of Science in the Department of Energy, the National Science Foundation (NSF), and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)—over ten years. To date, ACI has fared well in Congress. The House of Representatives has already approved the increases for the Office of Science (up 14 percent), NSF (up 8 percent), and NIST (core laboratory research and infrastructure up 24 percent). Key Senate Subcommittees have approved similar increases. Of equal significance to the budget proposal, the President's pronouncements represent an effort to change the public perception of the value of science. This is the capstone of a fifteen-year effort on the part of the scientific community, including the American Physical Society, to develop a new rationale for funding physical science research in the post-Cold War era. 30 years of economic research suggests there is a strong correlation between the government investments in education and research, particularly physical science and engineering research, and future economic performance. The President made this connection explicit for the public in his *State of the Union Address* and in subsequent speeches and town hall meetings. The author will discuss these trends and the outlook for ACI going forward.