National Science Foundation director: Researchers have role in global issues

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CLEMSON - South Carolina university researchers have a role as the National Science Foundation tackles global challenges of sustainable energy production and climate change, the agency’s director told The Greenville News.

South Carolina’s research universities are making important contributions in energy and other fields, said Arden L. Bement Jr., director of the agency that funds and supports science and engineering research at institutions across the nation.

He also credited U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis, R-Greenville, for supporting work of the agency and South Carolina researchers in these fields.

Bement’s comments came in an interview with The Greenville News following an appearance as keynote speaker at Clemson University’s Victor Hurst Academic Convocation Tuesday.

Bement told faculty and staff that the nation must reduce dependence on fossil fuels and more accurately predict and mitigate the effects of climate change in ways that avoid further ecological harm.

"Nowhere is innovative thought and inspiration more urgently needed than in the search for sources of sustainable energy," Bement said. "It has been our ever growing global use of fossil fuels that has created the climate challenge in the first place."

Development of green alternatives to gasoline are "promising," he said, but added that it may take a decade before green gasoline arrives at the pump.

Development of new biofuels is only one aspect of work to be done. Energy conversion, storage and conservation strategies also are needed, he said.

Bement issued a challenge to educators and researchers at Clemson and nationwide to "lead the world in adapting to a new and sustainable future" and also issued a warning:

"If we in the U.S do not change our research paradigm to a more holistic one then others may well pass us by," he said.

Esin Gulari, dean of Clemson’s College of Engineering and Science, told The News that Clemson is "well positioned to work to find innovative and sustainable solutions to the nation’s problems."

This is because Clemson encourages its engineers and scientists to share their different perspectives and work together on interdisciplinary teams to find solutions to these complex problems, said Gulari, who has a presidential appointment on the National Science Board, which oversees the National Science Foundation.

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Abstract (Document Summary)