MEGAPROJECTS AND DEMOCRACY

Challenges and Prospects in Nanotech Legislation

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Overview

- Loka Institute background and current status
- Nanotech legislative action
- Implications
"Loka" is derived from the ancient Sanskrit word, *lokasamgraha*, which means: unity of the world, interconnectedness of society, and the duty to perform action for the benefit of the world."
The Loka Institute

“Making research, science and technology responsive to democratically-decided social and environmental concerns”
Sec. 2(b)10(D) - “providing, through the National Nanotechnology Coordination Office…for public input and outreach to be integrated into the program by the convening of regular and ongoing public discussions through mechanisms such as citizens’ panels, consensus conferences and educational events…”
Reauthorization – 2008 - present

- Honda bill
- House – reject 10% for EHS
- Legislative group develops Model Nanotech Legislation (www.loka.org)
- Senate S’08 – different rhetoric, same response as House
- May 2009 – new version incorporates some suggestions
Critique

- Precaution vs. competitiveness
- Reductionism: science is control over nature
- No criteria for balancing promotion and precaution
- Secondary education as propaganda
- Oblivious to structural effects – poverty and inequality
- U.S. global leadership – quick profits, or an enduring industry?
Tactics

- Move ELSI and EHS to the top of program activities
- Concrete description of learning, deliberation, and paths to decision-makers
- Specify labor, environmental and public interest participation throughout
- “Development and application” replaced by “responsible design and use”
- Include public and nonprofit sectors as players in the nanoworld
- Tighten up definition of EHS research
- Include broad social effects
- Include ELSI – EHS in secondary education
Program Review – “the effectiveness of the Program’s activities addressing ethical, legal, environmental, health, and other societal concerns, including issues of poverty and health disparities, in guiding the Program’s goals and activities.”
Advisory Panel – “The Advisory Panel established by the President...shall consist primarily of members from academic institutions [and], from industry, from organizations representing labor, and from environmental and other nonprofit organizations with research, education, and/or public information programs concerned with nanotechnology.”
“It is a paradox of modern democratic societies that the state is considered both the cause and the cure of injustice.”

J. Walton, *Western Times and Water Wars*, UC Press, 1992