



For Immediate Release:
January 24, 2003

Contact: Lisa Wright at 202-225-2721 or
Sallie Taylor at 301-694-3030

Rep. Roscoe Bartlett Reports on Science Committee Tour of Antarctica

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Frederick, MD – Congressman Roscoe Bartlett (R-6-MD) today released a statement reporting on his recent trip with other members of the House Science Committee and National Science Foundation (NSF) Director Rita Colwell. The delegation reviewed and toured federally-funded NSF research programs and facilities in Antarctica and Hawaii as well as the Great Barrier Reef off Australia. For approximately three days, the delegation visited American research stations on the Antarctic continent, including a brief stop at the U.S. Amudsen-Scott South Pole Station. While in Antarctica, Congressman Bartlett also provided long distance telephone science lessons about research in Antarctica and answered questions from students at Hancock Middle/High School and North Carroll High School.

“I departed on January 11 and returned January 22. I flew almost 25,000 miles and spent nearly half that time – almost a week just traveling – mainly inside airplanes. I crossed the International dateline twice and was 17 hours ahead of East Coast time while I was in Antarctica. Members of Congress are responsible spending taxpayers’ money wisely and there really is no substitute for observing first hand exactly how the money is spent. We spend almost \$250 million a year on research in Antarctica and \$17 million a year on marine mammal, oceanographic and weather research programs in Hawaii. As a senior member of the Science Committee and one of only three scientists in the Congress, I returned encouraged and impressed by the ongoing contributions and efficient use of the federal government’s investments from these research efforts.

“As a scientist and former professor, I want to do everything I can to encourage our young people to study and consider careers in science, mathematics and engineering.

That's why one the highlights of this trip was the opportunity to talk to students at Hancock Middle/High School and North Carroll High School. Because of the 17-hour time difference, it was 6:00 am the following day in Antarctica and 12:00 noon in Maryland when I spoke by speakerphone to the students and answered their questions. I had arranged for the students and their teachers to receive the same extensive background briefing that I had received about Antarctica before the phone calls. I was impressed by their detailed and knowledgeable questions. They kept me on my toes!

“Antarctica is larger than the United States and Mexico combined. Federally funded research in Antarctica is making unique contributions to advancing our knowledge about the origins of the universe, the origins of life and global climate. For instance, Antarctica is the best site in the world for conducting radio astronomy and nearly as good as from space but at a fraction of the cost. Some of the most unusual life forms in the world exist only in extreme environments such as Antarctica. Scientists have discovered that dinosaurs and subtropical vegetation existed at one time in Antarctica. It controls the weather in the southern hemisphere and significantly impacts global climate. It's summer now in Antarctica, but it was 24 degrees below zero when I was at the South Pole. It was much warmer, but still only around 30 degrees at McMurdo Station on the coast. I'm intrigued by what caused such massive changes in the climate.

“Hawaii is the only place on Earth where scientists are able to study many species of sharks, whales, porpoises and other marine mammals in their natural habitat. There is also significant research on weather and other aspects of oceanography including coral reefs -- many of which are located under a mile from land. By contrast, the Great Barrier Reef in Australia is a two-hour boat ride from shore and it's so big it would stretch from New York to Miami.

“While in Hawaii, I also had the opportunity to meet extensively with the Commander and other senior officers of the Navy's Pacific fleet. The Pacific Ocean is so big, it covers 62% of the world. I was just appointed to be the chairman of the Subcommittee on Projection Forces of the Armed Services Committee that has jurisdiction over most Naval programs and with the serious ongoing situations concerning Iraq and North Korea, this was an invaluable opportunity.

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The Science Committee has jurisdiction over NSF, the lead agency for the United States Antarctic Program (USAP), and over other participating federal agencies such as NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

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