

Making a Case for Basic Science

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The year 2013 closed with a bang. On December 17, I had an incredible opportunity. I could discuss progress of Kavli IPMU and the SuMIRe project in front of Prime Minister Abe, Minister of Finance Aso, Minister of State for Science and Technology Policy Yamamoto, and other members of the Council for Science and Technology Policy (CSTP), the highest body in Japan on this matter. They all appeared very happy to hear about the way we draw excellent people from around the world, built a research center with high global visibility, and lead a large international collaboration.

But I had an additional point to make in the last one minute. In the worldwide trend of focusing government funding on applied research, Japan has been very good in sustaining funding for basic research, and it should stay so for her own benefits. Many of the technological breakthroughs, such as Maglev, worldwide web, imaging techniques for cancer diagnosis, or GPS, started with basic curiosity-driven research and their needs. In addition, the future position of the country requires educated talents, who can be trained through global environment typical in basic research. This point seems obvious to many of us scientists, but needs to be emphasized repeatedly and widely, especially to policymakers. Prime Minister applauded right after my eight-minute presentation, apparently the first time on CSTP, and I was greatly encouraged.

Mr. Fred Kavli was a true cheerleader for basic science. We were all greatly saddened by the news that he passed away on Nov 21. It was only a year

and half earlier when he gave a passionate speech at our naming ceremony. He said *"I support science because of curiosity and because I believe in its long-range benefit to humanity. Science helps us lead healthier lives. Practically everything we touch in our daily lives has been improved or developed through basic research. The progress of our entire standard of living is tied closely to the fruits of science and research."* He left a great legacy and we will miss him dearly.

To keep the momentum going on our basic quests for the secrets of the Universe, it takes effort on all fronts. Our staff has been exemplary in supporting all our absent-minded academics all along. On Dec 20, some of our staff members were awarded President's prize for improving business practice because they produced a wonderful safety video for online training. It is funny, witty, yet conveys all crucial information for our newcomers to watch. This is the second time for us to receive this prize, demonstrating that we are leading the University not only in science but also in the way to do business.

