

TURNING POINT

Andrew Zwicker

Andrew Zwicker, head of science education at the Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory in New Jersey, announced his candidacy on 9 March as a Democratic congressman for the state. If elected, he'll be the fourth physicist ever to hold a federal legislative office.

How did you end up making science education such a big part of your career?

Two career-changing events happened when I was a postdoc. First, I met Rush Holt before he became US Representative Holt (Democrat, New Jersey). At the time, he was creating the Plasma Physics Laboratory's science-education programme, and recruited me as a mentor. Second, I mentored a student from a public high school in Trenton, New Jersey, who had amazing maturity and drive but was behind in her schoolwork. I spent hours helping her to write a computer program to analyse scientific data. She got a full scholarship to university, and I learned how rewarding it is to mentor young scientists. Soon after, I was named as head of the science-education programme. I went from fusion researcher to science educator. Now I'm researching the use of electric glow discharges, such as those from fluorescent lamps, as teaching aids.

How have your interests evolved?

While leading the science-education programme, I was interested in ways to get people engaged in science. In 2006, I won first prize in an art-science competition run by the university for an image I took of a floating dust cloud of silica microspheres suspended in a plasma and illuminated by laser light (see go.nature.com/ckpmnl). But I am perhaps proudest of receiving an honourable mention for a video explaining what a flame is to an 11-year-old — an entry to a competition run by the Alan Alda Center for Communicating Science at Stony Brook University in New York. Scientists are stereotyped as being bad communicators, but I feel that we have a responsibility to communicate what we are doing with taxpayers' money. If the public isn't behind us, then appropriators in Congress will not see the value of our work.

Have you always had political aspirations?

No. I can't say that running for Congress has been a lifelong ambition. When Rush announced that he wasn't going to run again, lots of people were caught off guard. Rush has a lot of respect in New Jersey. People started asking me if I would consider running because my narrative is so similar to his — we are both plasma physicists involved with



Princeton's science-education programme. When a Republican approached me, saying that the country needed people who use facts and evidence to make decisions rather than being motivated by other factors and ideologies, I started to seriously consider running.

What advice has Holt offered you?

We have discussed the current state of affairs in Washington DC and the difficulties associated with gridlock. He told me that both Democrats and Republicans would turn to him or his staff on science issues. So being a scientist could help me to reach both parties.

What persuaded you to run?

The undergraduates on campus were so enthusiastic, and asked hard questions. They desperately want the government to address big issues such as energy and climate and to help to make Earth a better place. I know I was talking to youthful, idealistic people, but it was overwhelming. I realized I had to do it.

Does being a physicist help or hinder your chances?

There are four candidates. I would not be a viable candidate in this district if I were not a scientist — three of my opponents are career politicians, have been in some level of politics for 20 years and have name recognition. One of my goals is to get younger people, who do not usually vote in mid-term elections, to the polls.

What's your campaign slogan?

Rush is well known for a bumper sticker that reads: "My Congressman is a rocket scientist." If people vote for me, they can keep their bumper sticker and just add the word "still". ■

INTERVIEW BY VIRGINIA GEWIN

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Burnout predictors

Women are more likely than men to find that work interferes with their home life, and consequently are more likely to burn out, finds a study (V. Blom *et al. J. Occup. Environ. Med.* **56**, 361–366; 2014). The authors surveyed 4,446 twins in Sweden to investigate the determinants of work-home and home-work interference. Although genetic effects were minimal, they found differences in stress levels between the sexes. Lead author Victoria Blum, a psychologist at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, says that women typically have more home responsibilities and thus a greater total workload than men. To avoid burning out, she says, researchers need to find ways to work from home when possible and to share home-based responsibilities more evenly.

IMMIGRATION

UK visa fast-track

Research Councils UK (RCUK) is piloting a scheme to streamline the entry of researchers into Britain under the 'Tier 1 (Exceptional Talent)' visa. It has teamed up with the Royal Society, the British Academy and the Royal Academy of Engineering to guarantee endorsement for researchers who are awarded specific RCUK fellowships and grants, a process that usually takes nine weeks. Rosie Beales, senior policy manager at the RCUK, says that the agency will assess the pilot scheme's success in the next six months. Representatives of UK universities and scientific organizations have warned that complicated visa procedures have made Britain an unattractive destination for scholars (see *Nature* **506**, 14–15; 2014).

SOCIAL MEDIA

Science 2.0

Using social media more often would help scientists to disseminate their results, debate findings and engage a wider audience, says a study (C. Greenhow and B. Gleason *Br. J. Educ. Technol.* **45**, 392–402; 2014). Co-author Christine Greenhow at Michigan State University in East Lansing, says that researchers must learn to create a robust online presence. As part of an upcoming study, she polled 1,600 US and Canadian faculty members and found that 15% use Twitter, 28% use YouTube and 39% use Facebook for scholarly activity. Greenhow is calling for social-media metrics to be added to the tenure process.