

# Plea for Bush to provide more science funding

Silicon Valley leader warns of threat to U.S. innovation

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With Silicon Valley mired in a technology recession — and the Bush administration cutting science and research funding — Democrats must issue a “call to action” to help train 100,000 new engineers and scientists before the nation suffers an irreparable “innovation shortfall,” one of the nation’s leading venture capitalists warned yesterday.

John Doerr, who played a key role in the creation of such technology giants as Netscape and At-Home, said Democrats must continue to place education — particularly the development of a new generation of innovators — at the top of their political agenda for the coming elections.



John Doerr

“We’re at a defining moment,” said Doerr, before dozens of key congressional and technology leaders of the New Democratic Network, meeting at the Fairmont Hotel yesterday. Doerr is a partner in the Menlo Park firm Kleiner Perkins Caufield and Byers. “The central battle is under way. . . . Opportunity, community, responsibility — these are themes we should keep hammering home.”

Doerr’s talk underscored both priorities for Silicon Valley, and the challenges before Democrats as they face the 2002 congressional elections — and the next presidential race. He called for the foundation of a \$2 billion Congressional Fellows Program, which would identify promising candidates in math, sciences and engineering — and then deliver individual scholarships to encourage them to seek higher education.

“I want the Bush administration to be a pro-science and pro-technology administration, but the budget they’ve submitted is not pro-science or pro-technology,” he said.

Doerr said the nation must immediately launch dramatic efforts to “look out for the next decade,” by calling on state and congressional leaders — and industry — to come up with large funding amounts that would go directly to the nation’s most promising tech students, rather than to institutions or universities.

The idea was well received by some congressional members who said the call was both timely and critical.

The Bush administration “cannot be characterized as visionaries” in the arena of science and technology, said Democratic Rep. Cal Dooley of Hanford. “When you’re cutting back on your basic investment in research and development, this is a prescription for reduced production in the future.”

Doerr, a key political organizer in Silicon Valley, has long been one of the Democratic Party’s most generous donors and one of its most influential tech voices as founder of the Technology Network, the valley’s powerhouse advocacy group.

Doerr, an influential voice in the Clinton-Gore administration — and in the tech community nationwide — has long pushed tech insiders to use their know-how and wealth with an eye toward social responsibility. Educational policies, such as NetDay, the New Schools Venture Fund and more charter schools, have been particular concerns for Doerr and

► DOERR: Page A5 Col. 5

DH20010360 E

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## Call for White House to increase science funds

► DOERR  
From Page A3

his bipartisan colleagues.

He said Democrats should continue to aggressively address education issues, and now focus on “radically” altering the conditions in the (state’s) 1,500 worst performing schools.

“We know which ones they are, and we’re going to do something about it,” said Doerr, adding that teachers must be assisted with smaller class sizes and schools, better preparation, and more financial aid. “Get the vouchers out, get authority in.”

But he said concern could not stop at K-12 education, and characterized the Bush administration’s funding for science research as woefully lax.

“There is currently no incentive to train scientists or leaders in education,” he said, adding that Bush tax cuts have placed more advances in jeopardy.

Among those in the New Democratic Network who came to San Francisco this weekend to hear

speakers like Doerr, and attend brainstorming sessions on Internet, economy, education and new technologies were dozens of political leaders, including California Reps. Dooley, Loretta Sanchez, Mike Honda, Lois Capps and Zoe Lofgren.

But the New Democratic Network has also proved a prodigious fund-raiser. Two events to gather campaign cash this weekend netted \$500,000, and Democratic Governor Gray Davis showed up at the network’s Friday night fund-raiser for more than two hours to discuss his energy and educational agendas.

“There’s a real sense of mission,” said Simon Rosenberg, who heads the network. “Democrats are willing to work harder than ever before on these issues . . . because there’s a sense of a job left undone.”

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