

# WHAT S NEW Robert L. Park Friday, 14 Mar 08 Washington, DC

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## 1. PHYSICS BLOC: FERMILAB PHYSICIST WINS HASTERT SEAT.

Tuesday, on his first day in office, Bill Foster (D-IL) cast the deciding vote to prevent tabling a Congressional ethics bill that would create an outside panel to investigate ethics complaints against House members. He will have to run again in November, but Foster's victory in a special election on Saturday to fill the seat vacated by the resignation of Dennis Hastert looked pretty convincing. Hastert had represented the vermilion 14th District for 20 scandal-filled years. Foster's PhD in physics is from Harvard (1984) and he had been at Fermilab for 22 years. Prominent scientists contributed both time and money to Foster's campaign, and he becomes the third PhD physicist serving in the House. He campaigned against the Iraq War and called for research on alternative energy.

## 2. A BIGGER PRIZE: TEMPLETON BUYS ANOTHER SCIENTIST.

The 2008 Templeton Prize was awarded yesterday to Polish cosmologist Michael Heller, 72 a Roman Catholic priest. The monetary value of the award is adjusted to be larger than the Nobel Prize. Initially, the prize was given to more saintly types, beginning with Mother Teresa in 1973, but of the last ten winners, seven have been physicists or cosmologists. After all, what's the point in becoming rich and powerful if you can't buy that which is important to you? For the governor of New York, what was important was submission of beautiful women. For Sir John Templeton the important thing is scientists declaring that they see the hand of God in the laws of nature. In 1998 he tried to buy the AAAS Dialog in Science and Religion. He came close, but settled for buying one scientist at a time. Heller believes God's existence can be found in the mathematical nature of the world. At the Pontifical Academy of Theology in Krakow, Poland, where he is a faculty member, Heller says he will use his prize to create a center for the study of science and theology, and will introduce his concept of "the theology of science."

## 3. THE WAR GOD: BUSH SPEAKS TO RELIGIOUS BROADCASTERS.

On Tuesday, the President delivered a 42-minute speech to the National Religious Broadcasters 2008 Convention in Nashville defending the Iraq war policy. It was a friendly audience. Mr. Bush promised to veto any legislation that seeks to reinstitute the hated "fairness doctrine" which

required broadcasters to give air time to opposing views: "This organization has had many important missions, but none more important than ensuring our airways – America s airways – stay open to those who preach the 'Good News.'" (Applause, and shouts of "Amen".)

4. EARMARKS: SENATE REJECTS BILL TO BAN EARMARKS.  
McCain, Obama and Clinton voted for the bill to ban earmarking, but only 26 other senators joined them. The plague of earmarking is out of control, and is at least partly responsible for the budget disaster that struck science this year. It s always been there, but 30 years it was largely confined to public–works projects such as sewers. It expanded into academic pork in the eighties. Many influential scientists cheered because it meant more money for science; What s New took a lot of flak for opposing the practice.

THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND.  
Opinions are the author's and not necessarily shared by the University of Maryland, but they should be.

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