White House official tours MSU facilities

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A top science and technology official in President Barack Obama’s administration was on campus Wednesday to scope out a number of MSU research projects, including a stop at the future site of the $550 million Facility for Rare Isotope Beams, or FRIB.

Kei Koizumi, assistant director for federal research and development in the White House’s Office of Science and Technology Policy, or OSTP, toured the Cyclotron and met with MSU researchers heading up research projects ranging from children’s health to bioenergy studies.

As an OSTP official, Koizumi is one of the people in charge of science policy and support by the federal government for research and other projects.

“I’m very impressed,” Koizumi said of his visit after a luncheon where he discussed the future of federal funding for research projects in numerous areas. “Originally, the idea was to come out and see the FRIB and the Cyclotron center. But it’s been wonderful to hear about the research that’s going on, on campus.”

Koizumi said federal spending for science and technology projects remains a priority for the Obama administration. He said Obama intends to double the amount of federal dollars spent on research spending by 2017, when compared to the amount spent in 2006.

J. Ian Gray, MSU vice president for research and graduate studies, said Koizumi’s visit allows the university to showcase its research projects in times of nationwide economic difficulties, when federal funding for research projects is becoming more crucial to universities.

“We’re competing directly against the faculty in other research institutions, so (it’s knowing) these folks can help us get access to where research funding is going,” Gray said. “Conversely, it will allow us to interact with the Office of Science and Technology (Policy) to suggest areas where research is needed and maybe even where MSU will be growing.”

Koizumi’s visit was primarily orchestrated by Mark Burnham, MSU’s associate vice president for governmental affairs, who lobbies on the university’s behalf in Washington. Burnham said the visit communicates to the Obama administration the importance of research conducted at MSU.

“(We’re) communicating to the White House personnel … what we’re doing, give them an opportunity to see some of the facilities and the research that we’re doing so they can get a real on-the-ground understanding of the kind of research we’re doing and the importance of that research to the state and the nation,” Burnham said.

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