

## Science meets politics

Impressions from the WE-Heraeus Forum and a deep dive into evidence, efficiency, and political cultures.

On November 6, 2025, the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences once again demonstrated that the annual event of the Wilhelm and Else Heraeus Foundation is a place of vibrant exchange. 180 invited guests discussed questions about the future—across disciplines and generations. The foundation brings together what rarely meets: young talents and experienced decision-makers from science, industry, schools, media, and politics.

Under the motto “Understanding and shaping the world through physics,” Jürgen Mlynek opened the forum and emphasized that science continuously builds bridges: between individuals and generations, between nations, religions, and cultures. An impressive example is the 60th anniversary of German-Israeli relations. Their foundation was laid by scientists from the Max Planck Society, who traveled to Israel just 20 years after the Holocaust, paving the way for a new friendship. Mlynek highlighted how strongly the foundation supports projects in this spirit, such as the international synchrotron project SESAME. Building bridges between science, business, politics, and civil society—that is precisely what this forum is for.

Another initiative is the foundation’s parliamentary fellowship,



Mathis Fricke reports from the Deep Dive in the plenary session.



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L4T-alumni and Bundestag fellows took part in the WE-Heraeus Forum in Berlin in November 2025.

which allows young PhD physicists to experience politics firsthand. Jürgen Mlynek stressed how important it is to give young people a look “into the engine room of politics”—while at the same time providing members of parliament with access to scientific expertise. Stephan Albani (Member of the Bundestag, CDU) emphasized how satisfied he has been with his fellows so far.

After two fascinating showcases on optical clocks (Tanja Mehlstäubler, PTB Braunschweig) and the future of semiconductor manufacturing (Thomas Schafbauer, Infineon), five parallel deep dives began. The topic „*scientific policy advice*“ was led by Christian Kuttner (Nature Portfolio), a Leading for Tomorrow (L4T) alumnus, and built on his experience as a parliamentary fellow—a role at the intersection of scientific advisor and intern with a PhD. As panelists, Norbert Holtkamp (Hoover Institution, Stanford University, USA) and Stephan Albani opened the session—both physicists emphasizing scientific evidence as the foundation of political decision-making.

Albani spoke very openly about his daily parliamentary work: how, as a physicist, he earned the nickname “explainer bear” for making

complex issues understandable in the Bundestag, and how scientific evidence finds its way into political decisions—often quietly, incrementally, and less through formal reports than through personal conversations. He also noted the difficulty of balancing speed, majority support, and a culture of compromise.

Norbert Holtkamp described the central role of privately funded think tanks in the United States, the high level of professionalization in political consulting and strategic expertise, and the ability of the U.S. system to mobilize enormous speed when needed—such as with the CHIPS Act. At the same time, he pointed to the “swing effects” of the system and the instabilities that arise when thousands of positions are reassigned with every change of government—a pendulum between efficiency and instability.

The discussion with the audience focused on efficiency and continuity, Germany’s Building Energy Act as an example of political hurdles, and the question of how much speed democracy can tolerate.

Mathis Fricke (Focused Energy), another L4T alumnus, served as rapporteur in the plenary session. He

summarized that the systemic differences between the two countries lie in their advisory cultures and societal expectations. This explains why, in Germany, decisions often fail not due to a lack of facts, but because of the difficulty of communicating uncomfortable consequences.

This raises the question of how complex issues can hold their ground in a communication landscape that rewards speed and simplification. In politics, there must be the courage to clearly state facts and separate them from political trade-offs. This is where scientific policy advice reveals its full potential.

The new format of reporting from the deep dives proved to be a successful experiment. Four additional L4T alumni—Jana Bröder, Olivia Noack, Matthias Widmann, and Diana Khapipova—summarized the results of the parallel sessions, responding to alum-



Stephan Albani, Member of the Bundestag (right), Norbert Holtkamp (center), and Christian Kuttner discuss differences between German and U.S. policy advisory systems.

ni requests for greater visibility.

On behalf of all L4T alumni and parliamentary fellows, we would like to sincerely thank the Wilhelm and Else Heraeus Foundation for the invitation and the opportuni-

ty to actively contribute to the forum. The WE-Heraeus Forum remains a place where physics builds bridges.

Christian Kuttner and Mathis Fricke

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