I am Robert Berdahl, President of the Association of American Universities. Thank you for this opportunity to speak.

I’m here to urge you to focus on the challenges facing the nation’s research universities.

I believe these challenges – including the disinvestment of states in public higher education, the sharp drop in university endowment, and the strategic investments in research universities being made by other nations imitating our success – threaten not only the primacy of U.S. research universities but also the unique research partnership established between these universities and the federal government a half-century ago.

In part at my urging, Senator Lamar Alexander and three other Members of Congress have asked the National Research Council to “assess the organization, intellectual, and financial capacity of public and private American research universities relative to research universities internationally.”

In a separate paper, which I am submitting for the record, I have asked the NRC to consider calling for the following: 1) develop a national strategy for our research universities, including consistent funding of research agencies; 2) address the growing costs incurred by universities to conduct federally sponsored research; 3) develop strategies to encourage the next generation of science and engineering faculty; and 4) take steps to maintain access to research universities for talented students regardless of income. I’ve also suggested some guiding principles, including maintaining competitive merit review processes, reimbursing universities fairly for the costs of research, reducing unnecessary administrative and reporting requirements for researchers; and encouraging maintenance of effort by states. I’ve suggested steps that universities need to take as well.

I believe PCAST should engage with the NRC study. The AAU university presidents and I would welcome the opportunity to work with you to begin addressing these issues.

Thank you.