ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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AAU WELCOMES NRC REPORT ON FUTURE OF RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES

Following is a statement by Hunter Rawlings, President of the Association of American Universities, on the report issued today by the National Academies’ National Research Council, “Research Universities and the Future of America: Ten Breakthrough Actions Vital to Our Nation’s Prosperity and Security.” The NRC report was prompted by a letter from four Members of Congress asking the National Academies to identify the top 10 actions that Congress, state governments, research universities, and others could take to assure the ability of the U.S. research university to maintain the excellence in research and doctoral education needed to help achieve national goals. Former AAU President Robert Berdahl discussed the report and the value of research universities in a Chronicle of Higher Education op-ed, and provided a set of recommendations to the panel on behalf of AAU.

Dr. Rawlings served briefly as a member of the NRC committee that wrote the report but resigned when he became President of AAU.

The National Research Council report on research universities is a call to action to which our nation needs to respond. It is the right report at the right time. It recognizes the fundamental role of research universities in the nation’s long-term prosperity and security and rightfully calls on the federal and state governments, industry, philanthropy, and universities alike to take responsibility for ensuring that these institutions remain the best in the world.

If Congress and the Executive Branch, business, and philanthropy respond to the report’s call for sustained federal investment in university research, for regulatory reform, for strengthened partnerships, for increased investment in graduate education, and for full reimbursement of the costs of university research, they will significantly strengthen the capacity of universities to meet the needs of the nation.

It is especially important that state governments carry out their responsibility to help restore the strength of our essential but financially troubled public research universities. The report aptly points to these institutions’ regional and national significance. We urge states to respond strongly to recommendations to restore investments in their research universities and to give them the autonomy they need to compete and to fulfill their educational and research missions. We also hope that the federal government will seriously consider recommendations for programs that can encourage states to live up to these obligations.

At the same time, universities must do their part by responding to calls for greater efficiencies and improvements in graduate and undergraduate education, without compromising quality. As the
report notes, there are numerous examples of universities that are doing all of these things, but we need to do more, particularly in raising the quality of undergraduate education, and in holding down costs.

The report emphasizes that the value of research universities is due in part to their comprehensive nature. We agree. Science and STEM fields are critical to our future, but the contribution universities make to advancing the humanities, arts, and the professions are essential as well, not only as important components of human inquiry and knowledge but in supporting the growing interdisciplinarity of research and education.

We strongly agree that now is the time to revitalize the government-university-industry partnership in innovation. We look forward to working with the committee members and others to share the findings and recommendations in the report with policymakers and industry leaders, and to helping inform the public about the importance of research universities to the nation’s future.

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The Association of American Universities is an association of 59 preeminent U.S. research universities and two Canadian counterparts organized to develop and implement effective national and institutional policies supporting research and scholarship, graduate and professional education, undergraduate education, and public service in research universities.

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