March 8, 2013

Dear Chairwoman Mikulski and Vice Chairman Shelby:

We write to urge you to pass an omnibus appropriations bill for FY 2013 rather than another continuing resolution (CR), and to make student financial aid and scientific research priorities for investment in the final legislation. We are encouraged that you are working in this direction, and we urge you to continue to do so.

Enactment of an omnibus appropriations bill, while not a return to true regular order, would nevertheless represent a return to rationality in the appropriations process. It would allow Congress to carry out its responsibility to determine spending and investment priorities for the fiscal year rather than defaulting to the status quo and allowing federal investments in key areas to erode by way of neglect and inflation. We have seen this too often in recent years.

A CR, on the other hand, would continue FY 2012 funding for most federal departments and agencies. This would be a poor outcome for federal investments in research and student aid that would be made even worse by the imposition of the sequester. We and the leaders of the universities we represent have repeatedly called for repeal of sequestration. And while we believe that sequestration should be voided as part of the legislation you are considering, an omnibus bill would, at the least, enable you to mitigate the worst effects of the sequester.

To the extent that you make adjustments in funding, we urge you to prioritize investments that yield long-term returns for our country, particularly education and research. Members of both political parties understand that federal investments in scientific research help grow our economy, lead to health advances, and strengthen our national security for today and for future generations. And investments in financial aid for low- and moderate-income college students help our nation increase educational access and attainment and thereby produce a stronger workforce. As we slowly emerge from the recession, it is essential for our long-term fiscal health that the economy continue to grow. Robust funding for these federal investments will help ensure sustained economic growth into the future. A CR at FY 2012 funding levels, particularly with a five percent sequestration cut to those investments, would take us in the opposite direction.

Finally, once you complete this legislation, we reiterate our earlier calls to Congress and the President to achieve a significant, balanced long-term budget agreement—a deal that will ease the extremely unwise pressure that has been placed on discretionary spending, which is where our nation invests in its future. Several times over the past 18 months, we have gone on record urging reform: both entitlement reform which generates savings, and tax reform which spurs growth and produces revenues for deficit reduction. This is not a small or
easy feat, but it is an act of leadership our country desperately needs. Again, we offer you and your colleagues our help in achieving this goal.

Sincerely,

Hunter R. Rawlings III
President
AAU

Peter McPherson
President
APLU

cc: Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid
    Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell
    House Speaker John Boehner
    House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi
    House Appropriations Committee Chairman Harold Rogers
    House Appropriations Committee Ranking Member Nita Lowey
    Members of the Senate Committee on Appropriations