As you know, the DOD's Fiscal Year 2015 budget request reduced investment in basic research programs of the military services and defense agencies by a total of roughly $150 million, or 7%, below the Fiscal Year 2014 appropriations levels. In testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Acting Assistant Secretary for Research and Engineering Alan Shaffer indicated this cut could translate into a loss of between 1,500 and 2,000 grants to the nation's universities. At a time when DOD is facing an accelerating loss of its technological superiority over peer nations, we do not feel that this reduction is wise or warranted.

The DOD funds basic research in a wide variety of scientific and engineering fields in order to aid in the development of revolutionary military capabilities and systems to ensure that the U.S. military continues to be the best in the world. Past basic research programs have led to many systems that our military uses today, including: the Internet, Global Positioning System (GPS), night vision technology, satellite technology, and stealth technology. Today's basic research programs are exploring the frontiers of robotics, nanotechnology, and biotechnology, and working to understand the complexities of the brain—with a goal of developing and deploying advanced military capabilities.

As the Subcommittee begins its consideration of the Fiscal Year 2015 Defense Appropriations Bill, we are writing to request support for the defense basic research program. Basic research programs in the Department of Defense (DOD) play a vital role in exploring fundamental science issues. These programs lay the groundwork for applied research and technology development programs that lead to higher performance, deployable defense systems. Further, the defense basic research program is an investment in the universities, small businesses, and government laboratories that serve as the engines of innovation for the DOD. Basic research programs also help the DOD engage with and support the training of the next generation of scientists and engineers. Through these programs, this next generation is connected to DOD technical challenges, and works in partnerships with DOD research organizations and industry. These connections can often lead these same individuals to work, throughout their careers, on the technical challenges facing the DOD, or in technical positions in government institutions, defense industry, or academia.

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We request that the Fiscal Year 2015 Defense Appropriations Bill increase funding for basic research programs to an amount closer to the level enacted for fiscal year 2014, if not higher. We recommend that this increase be allocated between the Service Multi-Disciplinary University Research Initiatives (MURI) program lines and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) Defense Research Sciences account. As required by section 2374 of title 10, United States Code, all of this funding should be awarded through the well-established, competitive, and merit-based processes used currently to fund basic research programs. This funding increase would be consistent with a similar authorization planned for the Senate Armed Services Committee’s version of the Fiscal Year 2015 National Defense Authorization Act.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Should your staff have any questions, please have them contact Maggie McNamara of Senator Levin’s staff at (202) 224-8942.

Sincerely,

Ron Wyden
Carl Levin
Jack Reed
Bill Nelson
Debbie Stabenow
Sasyby Chambliss
Robert Menendez
Sherrod Brown
Roger Wicker
Jeanne Shaheen