May 2, 2007

Dear Representative:

This evening, the House will begin consideration of the National Science Foundation (NSF) reauthorization bill (H.R. 1867). The NSF plays a critical role in advancing university-based fundamental research as well as science, engineering and math education at all levels. I am writing to ask that you oppose several expected amendments to H.R. 1867.

As an association that represents 60 leading public and private research universities in the United States, the Association of American Universities (AAU) is particularly concerned about and would urge opposition to any amendments that would reduce the authorization funding levels in the bill for NSF. The increased funding proposed in this legislation is consistent with the Democratic Innovation Agenda, the Administration’s American Competitiveness Initiative, and the National Academies’ *Rising Above the Gathering Storm* report. This increase in basic research at NSF is an essential element of efforts to help our nation maintain its competitive edge in science and technology. AAU respectfully requests that you vote against any amendment that would reverse this bipartisan tide of support for NSF and its programs.

In addition, AAU urges you to oppose amendments that may be offered by Reps. Campbell and Garrett that would strip the funding of specific social–sciences research grants that have already been awarded by NSF after rigorous and highly competitive merit review.

Merit review, also called "peer review," is used by the NSF and other federal research agencies to allocate federal funds for scientific research. This competitive process, in which panels of scientific experts evaluate the quality of research proposals, ensures that only the most promising and highest quality science receives federal support. The merit review system maximizes the benefits of the American people’s investment in science and is a primary reason America has led global scientific discovery since the end of World War II.

Some members of Congress question the value of certain types of research in the social and behavioral sciences. However, such research has been invaluable to our understanding of human health and cultural development, as well as our understanding of the impact of humans on environmental systems. Indeed, Congress has oversight responsibility for ensuring that proper policies and procedures are in place to determine that these funds are effectively allocated based on sound scientific judgment. By protecting the scientific merit review system, which subjects research proposals to rigorous review for scientific merit and societal benefit, Congress ensures that the highest quality research is funded with federal dollars.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns regarding these amendments to this very important piece of legislation.

With best regards,

Robert M. Berdahl
President
Association of American Universities