AAU PROPOSES SCIENCE POLICY AGENDA FOR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES, NEXT ADMINISTRATION

The Association of American Universities (AAU) today proposed a detailed agenda for strengthening the nation’s innovative capacity and elevating the role of science in the administration of the next President. AAU President Robert M. Berdahl said the organization is urging the remaining Presidential candidates to adopt elements of the plan in their campaigns and intends to work with the next Administration on implementation.

The document, entitled “Science as a Solution: An Innovation Agenda for the Next President,” calls on the next President to strengthen the nation’s scientific and technological workforce and infrastructure and to integrate science more effectively into the national policy agenda as well as the policymaking process. Asserting that these steps would make the nation more economically competitive, the report points to the importance of the nation’s “matrix of innovation,” particularly its system of higher education and research.

“As each candidate considers the resources on which his or her administration might draw for ideas and talent,” the report states, “few are as valuable as the people and organizations that comprise America’s matrix of innovation. The elements of this matrix—universities, businesses, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and individual innovators—are seeking and creating real solutions for the challenges we face.

“It is this innovation matrix—decentralized, networked, cross-disciplinary, and sparked by the intellectual genius of Americans and people from around the world—that can ensure America’s national and economic security and world leadership in the 21st century.”

At the core of this system, the report adds, is the nation’s system of higher education and research.

The four categories of recommendations in the report are as follows:

- Harness the nation’s innovation capacities to help address major national and international challenges, such as energy self-sufficiency, the environment and climate change, health care and global diseases, and national and homeland security;
• Expand and nurture U.S. talent in science, mathematics, and engineering to create a workforce ready to meet the innovation challenges of the 21st century, with measures such as increased support for undergraduate and graduate students in these fields, targeted funding for young scientists, improvement of K-12 education in mathematics and science, and easing pathways to citizenship for talented scientists and students from overseas;

• Reaffirm and strengthen the government-university partnership through such steps as enhanced funding for basic research, continued support for the transfer of technologies from universities to the marketplace, and reliance on peer review for federally supported science; and

• Elevate the role of science in White House policy decisions by raising the status of the President’s science advisor, making greater use of the advice of federal scientific advisory committees, and enhancing coordination of scientific research across the federal government.

The report also calls on the next President to create a new federal advisory committee to continually assess the health of the university-government partnership, which fosters science and innovation and trains new generations of scientists, engineers, mathematicians, and others.

Recent developments, according to the report, threaten this long-standing and productive relationship, “undermining universities’ ability to conduct important research on behalf of the federal government and the American people.” These include “increasing federal regulations and associated compliance costs; arbitrary restrictions on reimbursement to universities for the costs of conducting federal research; and growing restrictions on communication of, and access to, scientific results.”

“The nation’s challenges are daunting,” the report concludes. “But America’s colleges and universities, particularly its research universities, will provide the people, ideas, and discoveries that will help us to meet and overcome them. To ensure the continued vitality of the nation’s research and education enterprise, the federal government and universities must work together in partnership.”

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The Association of American Universities is an association of 62 leading public and private research universities in the United States and Canada. AAU focuses on issues important to research-intensive universities, such as funding for research, research policy issues, and graduate and undergraduate education. AAU universities award over one-half of all U.S. doctoral degrees and 55 percent of those in the sciences and engineering. They are on the leading edge of innovation, scholarship, and solutions that contribute to our nation's economy, security, and well-being.