February 28, 2006

The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy
United States Senate
Washington, DC  20510

Dear Senator Kennedy:

On behalf of the Association of American Universities (AAU), an organization of 60 leading public and private research universities in the United States, I write to thank you for introducing the Right TRACK (The Right Time to Reinvest in America's Competitiveness) Act of 2006 and to express our strong support for the goals of this important legislation.

The National Defense Education Act of 1958, along with the substantial federal investment in basic research that accompanied it, was a seminal act of public policy that enhanced our nation’s security and economic prosperity in the latter half of the 20th century. Like you, AAU believes that today’s security and economic challenges require similarly bold measures to strengthen education and research. Your legislation steps up to these challenges. It would enhance American competitiveness and security by providing resources and establishing policies and programs that would greatly strengthen the federal government’s investment in the nation’s education and research enterprises.

AAU recently issued a white paper, “National Defense Education and Innovation Initiative,” calling for investments and policy changes by the federal government and universities to strengthen our nation’s research enterprise and to produce more high-quality scientists, engineers, and language experts. We see your legislation as a very important means of realizing these goals.

AAU is especially supportive of the following provisions in the bill:

- the ten-percent annual increase for seven years in basic research at the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, NASA, the Department of Energy Office of Science, and the Department of Defense 6.1 and 6.2 research programs;
- increased funding for the National Science Foundation’s Math and Science Partnership program and the Teacher Institutes for the 21st Century program;
- the new “Contract for College Opportunity” grant program;
- the proposed Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grants;
- the increase in federal student loan forgiveness for teachers of math, science, engineering, and critical foreign languages who teach in high-poverty schools; and
- the provisions to increase study abroad and foreign language study opportunities for students and to create summer institutes to help teachers integrate international content into their curricula.

I want to express our appreciation to you for introducing this legislation and for taking a leadership role in proposing solutions to help meet our nation’s pressing economic and security challenges. We at AAU look forward to working with you to advance your proposals.

Cordially,

Nils Hasselmo
President