October 16, 2009

The Honorable David R. Obey  
Chair, House Committee on Appropriations  
2314 Rayburn House Office Building  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman,

On behalf of the Association of American Universities (AAU) and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), whose combined memberships include most of the major public and private research universities in the United States, we write in support of the Defense 6.1 basic research program, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), and the National Defense Education Program (NDEP). We respectfully request that you provide funding for 6.1 basic research, DARPA, and NDEP at least at the levels included in the House-passed bill.

Innovations developed from basic research funded by the Defense Department – including DARPA – have contributed significantly to our nation’s economic and national security. They have helped make America’s military the best-equipped and most effective in the world. The Defense Department sponsored the basic research that led to the development of the Internet, GPS, modern computing, and other cutting-edge technologies that are an essential part of not only national security, but also modern communications and commerce. The knowledge required to generate the cutting-edge technologies our troops employ is dependent on sustained investment in the long-term, fundamental research sponsored by the Defense Department’s 6.1 basic research program, which supports important research and educational activities of scientists, engineers, and students at universities.

With respect to DARPA, the depth of the proposed spending cuts in the Senate-passed bill is especially troubling. We recognize that in recent years DARPA has not fully executed the funds it has been provided by the Congress. We would note, however, that DARPA’s new leadership has committed itself to significant management changes. We are particularly concerned that the Senate-proposed funding level would potentially impede DARPA’s ability to execute new start programs. We appreciate and respect Congress’s important oversight role over DARPA’s spending, and we hope that an alternative way of ensuring accountability can be agreed upon in the final bill. We urge you to fund DARPA at least at the House-passed level.

We also urge you to include the $20 million increase over FY 2009 as requested by the Administration and approved by the House for NDEP. NDEP is a valuable program that invests across the continuum of science, engineering and math education to fund the next generation of innovators who will use their talents in support of our nation’s security. Continued funding growth for NDEP in FY 2010 will permit increased support for more bright undergraduate and graduate students who will be the backbone of our future national security scientific and technical workforce.
We thank you for your consideration of our views and for supporting the basic research that underpins much of our nation’s military effectiveness.

Sincerely,

Robert M. Berdahl  
President  
Association of American Universities

Peter McPherson  
President  
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities