March 10, 2017

President Donald J. Trump  
The White House  
United States of America

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Senate Majority Leader  
United States Senate

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Senate Minority Leader  
United States Senate

The Honorable Paul Ryan  
Speaker of the House  
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
House Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear President Trump and Congressional Leaders:

On behalf of the Association of American Universities, an organization that includes 60 leading U.S. research universities, I urge you to use the opportunity of the uncompleted FY17 appropriations process and the beginning of the FY18 budget process to revitalize the federal government’s scientific research and higher education investment strategy.

The Budget Control Act’s (BCA) sequestration process and discretionary spending caps have been an inadequate and counterproductive substitute for the major budget agreement that is needed to address our nation’s long-term fiscal issues. By placing much of the focus of deficit reduction on nondefense discretionary spending, the federal government has hampered its research and higher education investments that foster innovation and create new jobs, improve health, strengthen national security, and enhance the knowledge and skills of the U.S. workforce. This has occurred at the same time other nations have been rapidly increasing their research and higher education budgets. If these trends continue, the U.S. risks creating an innovation deficit and losing its status as the global innovation leader.

With budgets for two fiscal years under consideration, you have a unique opportunity to make bold moves to strengthen economic competitiveness and national security. For FY17, we urge you to avoid a year-long continuing resolution (CR) and complete the appropriations process by acting on key bipartisan decisions already made. For example, the House and Senate appropriations bills include funding increases for the National Institutes of Health, the Department of Agriculture’s Agriculture and Food Research Initiative, and the Department of Energy’s Office of Science and ARPA-E. The Senate Appropriations Committee proposes restoring the year-round Pell Grant, which would improve time to degree for more than a million low-income students.
Additionally, the House Appropriations Committee proposes vital funding increases for NASA’s science, aeronautics, and space technology programs. All these proposed increases would help prevent an innovation deficit and maintain U.S. preeminence in innovation.

With respect to FY18, we are deeply distressed by the $6 billion reduction from FY17 in the BCA-imposed discretionary spending caps. We are further concerned by news reports that the Administration is considering far more substantial cuts to nondefense discretionary spending.

Our nation faces difficult long-term fiscal issues, and the solution is not to reduce investments that help address them. The solution lies in reforming entitlement programs – where most spending occurs – and taxes in ways that control spending, spur economic growth, raise revenues, and protect the most vulnerable in our society. We urge you to negotiate increased discretionary spending caps for FY18 and beyond that will permit sufficient investment in scientific research, higher education, and other important programs that will build a better America and sustain our nation’s global leadership.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

Mary Sue Coleman
President

cc: Members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees
Members of the House and Senate Budget Committees
Members of the House Ways and Means Committee
Members of the Senate Finance Committee