



ASSOCIATION OF
AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES

ASSOCIATION OF
PUBLIC AND
LAND-GRANT
UNIVERSITIES



June 11, 2012

The Honorable Harry M. Reid
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boehner
Speaker of the House
U. S House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader Reid, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Boehner and Minority Leader Pelosi:

On behalf of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) and the Association of American Universities (AAU), whose combined members include the majority of the nation's public and private research universities, we write to express our serious concern with Section 308 of H.R. 2146, the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act, and Sec. 501 of S. 1789, the 21st Century Postal Service Act. These provisions, inserted as amendments to the underlying bills in their respective chambers, would place severe restrictions on the ability of government employees to attend important meetings, workshops, and conferences at our educational institutions.

We believe it is important to prevent wasteful government spending. However, these provisions as written would inadvertently harm the partnership between the federal government and the nation's higher education institutions that has served the country so well over many decades. Higher education institutions, particularly research universities, have daily interactions with many Federal agencies, ranging from the Department of Education (ED) to the National Institutes of Health to the Department of Homeland Security. Whether it is a meeting between an ED official and our financial aid officials on student aid programs, a university conference on research advances in clean coal technology that includes a Department of Energy participant, or a meeting between university research administrators and weapons of mass destruction coordinators from the Federal Bureau of Investigation regarding biosecurity safeguards, these interactions between higher education and the federal government are important to our national security, public health, education, and global competitiveness.

Under these provisions, these types of interactions would be severely curtailed because a government agency would not be permitted to expend any funds, however small it may be, on more than one visit per year to the same university. This would be harmful to continuing projects, programs, initiatives, and discussions that require more than a single in-person meeting or conference. Given that many campus departments have good reasons to interact with the same federal agencies, this could also create an unintended and unproductive competition within a single campus to be the first to arrange a campus visit from a federal agency official.

The exchange of information, ideas, and innovations between academic experts and federal policymakers is vital to tackling the many challenges facing our nation and the world. As education providers, scientific research centers, and major employers, our universities believe it is imperative to preserve an open flow of communication between our campuses and the federal government.

We urge you to protect the partnership between federal policymakers and the higher education community and maintain the ability of government employees to participate in meetings and other events organized by and held at our institutions. We hope to work with you to improve these provisions as the legislative process continues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Hunter R. Rawlings III" with a stylized flourish at the end.

Hunter R. Rawlings III
President
Association of American Universities

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Peter McPherson" in a cursive style.

Peter McPherson
President
Association of Public and Land-grant
Universities