



ASSOCIATION OF
AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES



October 19, 2011

The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye
Chairman
Subcommittee on Defense
Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable C.W. Bill Young
Chairman
Subcommittee on Defense
Appropriations Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Defense
Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Norman D. Dicks
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Defense
Appropriations Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Inouye and Young and Ranking Members Cochran and Dicks:

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 thank you for your strong support for Department of Defense (DOD) 6.1 basic research programs that support cutting-edge science and technology vital to the country's national and economic security.

As you work to finalize the FY12 Defense appropriations bill (H.R. 2219), we would like to draw your attention to three important funding priorities for research universities and their continuing efforts to work in partnership with DOD to meet its scientific and education needs: 1) 6.1 basic research programs, 2) DARPA, and 3) the Minerva Initiative.

First, we commend and thank you for the strong and sustained funding growth both the House and Senate FY12 Defense appropriations bills include for 6.1 basic research programs. Addressing complex military challenges – such as improvised explosive devices, information warfare, and weapons of mass destruction – requires new technologies. The new knowledge needed to develop such technologies depends on sustained investments in basic research performed at U.S. universities. Moreover, DOD 6.1 basic research grants and contracts support not only scientific and engineering research, but also graduate research assistantships, thereby helping to train the next generation of U.S. scientists and engineers. Undergraduate scholarships and graduate fellowships, funded by the National Science, Mathematics And Research for Transformation (SMART) Grant and the National Defense Science and Engineering Graduate (NDSEG) Fellowship programs, help attract and retain top U.S. citizens for study in fields vital to addressing security-related challenges. We also support stable and sustained funding for 6.2 applied research and other DOD science and technology programs.

Second, we thank you for continued funding support for the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) and its 6.1 basic research programs. DARPA has historically made investments in high-risk, high-reward research that has led to extraordinary technological advances. Sustained funding support in FY12 for DARPA's basic, as well as applied, research programs will help to foster the game-changing technologies of the future.

Lastly, we strongly urge you to preserve the external grants element of DOD's Minerva Initiative program. Unfortunately, the Senate version of the FY12 Defense appropriations bill would eliminate funding for new Minerva extramural research grants. The House bill would cut funding significantly and thereby, reduce the number of new awards in FY12. We urge you to reconsider these decisions and provide funding for this forward-thinking program at the level recommended by the Pentagon, but at a minimum at the House-passed level.

The Minerva Initiative is a social science research program that focuses on areas of strategic importance to U.S. national security policy. As envisioned and developed by former Defense Secretary Robert Gates, Minerva's goal is to improve the DOD's basic understanding of the social, cultural, behavioral, and political forces that shape regions of the world critical to U.S. interests. Minerva research grants to university-based researchers enable DOD to leverage expertise and resources to develop foundational knowledge about sources of present and future conflicts, as well as a better understanding of the political trajectories of key world regions. The program supports interdisciplinary and cross-institutional projects that address specific topic areas determined by the Secretary of Defense. Without funding for new grants, Minerva will lose a critical capability that Secretary Gates sought to achieve by creating this program – to tap into and benefit from social science expertise external to the Defense Department.

We thank you for your consideration of our views and recommendations. We stand ready to work with you through the remainder of the appropriations process to create a final version of this legislation that meets our nation's security needs.

Sincerely,



Hunter R. Rawlings III
President
Association of American Universities



Peter McPherson
President
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities

cc: House Appropriations Committee Chairman Harold Rogers
Members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense
Members of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense