This letter provides a response from the two SPEC observers (Robert Duce and Franco Einaudi) to the review by an NSF panel of the proposal submitted by UCAR to continue the operation of NCAR. This proposal was submitted following an extensive review by the NSF Division of Atmospheric Sciences of the NCAR scientific and facilities divisions and of UCAR and NCAR management. These latter reviews were carried out late in 2001, and SPEC participated fully in those reviews. In the current NSF proposal review, held in Boulder from December 17-19, 2002, we participated in all of the public presentations and discussions of the review panel. We also met with the review panel privately for approximately one hour near the end of the review. We did not participate in any of the other closed sessions of the review panel.

We were impressed with the thoroughness and thoughtfulness of the NSF Review Panel, which was chaired by Conway Leovy. Sixteen external mail reviews were obtained, and the review panel had carefully read both the proposal and those external reviews, and had written and exchanged comments themselves on a number of issues concerning the proposal before the panel meeting took place. The schedule of the review panel while in Boulder was flexible, allowing them to explore particular issues in more detail and address some issues with more care, as the need arose. We believe that the entire process was carried out in a fair and impartial way. We also believe that NCAR and UCAR did an excellent job not only in writing the proposal, but also in the excellent oral presentations made to the review panel. We also note that they very effectively responded rapidly to additional information requested during the review and to changes in the review schedule that were occasionally necessary.

The final conclusions of the NSF review panel are presented in “Panel Report on the Review Proposal of the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research Management of the National Center for Atmospheric Research 2003-2008”. The SPEC observers concur with the overall evaluation of the proposal as indicated in that report, which was highly complimentary and positive about not only the proposal, but the leadership at UCAR and NCAR and the strong research programs at NCAR. We note that many of the comments and conclusions in the proposal review report are similar to comments made by the previous reviews in 2001 and reiterated in the SPEC report on those earlier reviews that we presented in January, 2002. The
bottom line of the NSF proposal review was a strong recommendation that the cooperative agreement for the operation of NCAR for the next five years be renewed, and that NSF be authorized to negotiate this agreement with UCAR. It was also noted that while the National Science Board decided not to open this proposal for competition this year, the intent is to open the proposal process to competition for the next renewal period in five years. SPEC understands the rationale for this decision, but wants to emphasize that all UCAR member institutions should recognize that this process will be significantly different in five years, and that plans for addressing this revised proposal process should begin to be developed soon.

The Findings and Recommendations of the review panel were outlined in twelve sections as follows:

Renewal of the cooperative agreement; strategic planning; assessment, performance metrics, and benchmarks; community participation in modeling and new initiatives; community data sets and information technology; oceanographic and paleoclimate research environmental and social impacts group; facilities; intellectual interactions between UCAR/NCAR and the university community; scientific staff; NCAR leadership in human relations and sound environmental practices; and mission creep and growth of the institution. We will not comment on the details of the individual recommendations, but we believe that the recommendations in each of these sections were constructive and positive and followed logically from discussions during the review. The composite NCAR Program Ranking was 4.6 out of 5.0, and the UCAR Management Ranking was 4.4 out of 5.0.

We want to make one specific comment concerning a private meeting the review panel had with only the leadership of NCAR. During that session there were clearly very positive statements made by NCAR division directors as well as the NCAR Director concerning the strong support and help given to NCAR by the UCAR leadership team. We feel that this is most important, and it illustrates clearly the positive teamwork that exists between NCAR and UCAR – a very important factor in the success of both organizations and in the success of this proposal.

We thank you for the opportunity to participate in the review process.

Sincerely yours,

Robert A. Duce  Franco Einaudi