November 1, 2004

The Honorable Christopher Bond
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

FACSIMILE SENT: 202-224-8149

Dear Mr. Chairman,

I am writing on behalf of the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research (UCAR), a non-profit consortium of 68 research universities dedicated to the advancement of the atmospheric sciences. As you may know, UCAR manages the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR), a world-class laboratory providing research results for this country in areas such as solar-terrestrial interactions, weather, and climate patterns and change.

The topic of my letter is FY05 funding for the National Science Foundation (NSF) and National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). As you and your colleagues enter into conference proceedings relating to the FY05 VA, HUD and Independent Agencies Appropriations final bill, I urge you to fund the Senate’s recommendation for NSF of $4.402 billion for Research and Related Activities (R&RA). While I know that complex world events and national issues are causing budgets to be extremely tight, the research funded by NSF cannot be diminished if this country is to remain the world leader in scientific research and technology development, both critical drivers of the nation’s economy and security.

Within the NSF R&RA budget line, I urge you to provide priority support for the Geosciences (GEO) Directorate. Budget and policy decisions are being made within NASA in particular that could diminish in dramatic fashion this country’s focus on Earth systems science. Given that we live on this planet and that our understanding of weather, climate, oceans, solar variability and space weather have everything to do with our economy, safety, and quality of life, we simply must have strong scientific programs in the atmospheric, Earth, and ocean sciences. I believe that the adjustments being made in the priorities within other agencies concerned with earth, ocean, and atmospheric sciences makes the support provided to the Foundation’s GEO directorate by the conference committee of a more critical nature than usual.

Regarding FY06 NASA funding, as I stated above, I am extremely concerned that a shift in priorities could diminish Earth science to a point that is unhealthy and unwise for the nation. The vision for human exploration presented by the Administration is exciting, but the critically important role that NASA plays at this point in time in Earth systems science must either be maintained, which would mean a reordering of the FY05 budget, or it must be carefully and thoughtfully moved to other agencies. Given that NASA provides the platforms and operations necessary to make the observations on which much
Earth systems science is based, it is difficult to imagine that other agencies could perform this role efficiently or effectively in the very near future. I encourage the conferees to endorse the Senate’s language expressing concern about the future of NASA’s science programs, to ensure that Earth systems science is not diminished in the FY05 funding bill, and to call for a National Academies study of the fate of science within NASA. I hope you and your colleagues agree that, while establishing an ambitious exploration goal is laudable, for the good of the country, NASA’s science programs must not suffer as a result.

On behalf of the atmospheric sciences community, I would like to thank you for your record of strong leadership on the Appropriations Committee.

Sincerely,

Richard A. Anthes

C: Allen Cutler
    Cheh Kim