July 21, 2004

The Honorable C. W. Bill Young
Chairman, House Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
2407 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Young:

On behalf of the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research (UCAR), a consortium of 68 research universities, I ask that you and your colleagues on the Appropriations Committee consider changes to the VA, HUD and Independent Agencies FY05 funding bill for the sake of this nation’s security, economic prosperity, and world scientific leadership. The scientific community understands the funding crisis facing the nation in this time of war and we appreciate that Congress has been extremely supportive of scientific research in the past. That support has paid tremendous dividends the effects of which we ask the full Committee to consider before your work on the bill tomorrow.

The cuts proposed by the VA, HUD Appropriations Subcommittee for the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) threaten current research, stop new program starts, and over time will jeopardize the country’s leadership in many scientific fields. Chairman Walsh and Ranking Member Mollohan have been strong supporters of NSF and NASA, and we understand that they were given the impossible task of funding too many critical priorities with too few resources. But scientific research is a vital part of the engine that drives our overall economy and enables the development of defense and homeland security technologies.

At a June 24 congressional briefing, speakers testified that increasing competition from the rest of the world is seriously challenging America's ability to keep productivity growing via creating new knowledge and quickly turning it into products. They showed data indicating that between 2001 and 2002, the U.S. experienced the largest single year reduction in industrial R&D performance since this data collection was started in 1953. Speakers said that R&D expenditures of our major competitor nations has been rising consistently for years, while the U.S. investment in physical sciences and engineering has been flat or in decline. One speaker concluded that this country is "living off of past efforts.” The country will obviously be weakened if research funding increases are stopped suddenly and reversed.
As you know, the NSF Authorization bill of 2002, signed by the President after the horrendous events of September 11, 2001, and supported unanimously in the House and Senate, authorized the doubling of the NSF budget. At the time of passage, House Science Committee Chairman Boehlert stated, “From our nation’s students, to our economy, and to our security, the fruits of this effort will be enjoyed for many years.” Representative Ehlers said, “The research results, while not clear now, will reap huge benefits in the future,” and noted that Federal Reserve Chairman Greenspan attributed much of the U.S. economic growth of the 1990s to scientific and technological achievements. While budget doubling may now be delayed for a few years, appropriating the Administration’s request of a 3 percent increase for NSF, particularly in these times of difficulty, represents wise leadership for the future of our nation.

I appreciate your attention to this critical matter and wish you well with the difficult Committee tasks ahead.

Sincerely,

Richard A. Anthes