



## ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES

September 7, 2004

Dear Representative:

On behalf of 60 of the leading public and private research universities in the United States, the Executive Committee of the Association of American Universities urges you to vote against any amendment to the House FY2005 Labor/HHS/Education Appropriations bill that would eliminate funding for specific research grants supported by the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

The biomedical research supported by NIH over the past 50 years has helped make the United States the world leader in science and medicine and has added to the length and quality of life of millions of Americans. Congress has been responsible for providing the resources that have made NIH's extraordinary success a reality. To be sure, Congress has oversight responsibility for ensuring that proper policies and procedures are in place to determine that these funds are effectively allocated based on sound scientific judgment. The remarkable advances achieved through NIH-supported research confirm the effectiveness of those policies and procedures. However, some in Congress are now questioning how research into particular aspects of human behavior could be a worthwhile use of taxpayer dollars.

The reality is that human behaviors are a major element in the cause and spread of many diseases, and research into how those behaviors cause, spread, or result from disease is a critical part of NIH's mission. For example, some 65 million Americans suffer from sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS; failure to study the behavior of at-risk populations would make it far more difficult for society to control the spread of these deadly illnesses.

NIH's research into such behaviors does not constitute endorsement of them. To the contrary, the point of this research is to determine how to change or eliminate these unhealthy behaviors, thus protecting the public health. As NIH Director Elias Zerhouni has told Congress, "[t]he constant battle against illness and disease...cannot be limited to biological factors but has to include behavior and social factors as well. Unhealthy human behaviors have been estimated to be the proximal cause of over half of the disease burden in our country."

By protecting the scientific peer review system, which subjects research proposals to rigorous review for scientific and public health merit, Congress ensures that the highest-quality research—research that contributes directly to public health—is funded with federal dollars. As Representative Ralph Regula, Chairman of the Labor/HHS/Education Appropriations Subcommittee, said during last year's debate on amendments introduced by Representatives Pat Toomey and Chris Chocola:

"I strongly urge the Members to resist the temptation to select a few grants for defunding because they do not like the sound of them based on one paragraph out of what probably was a number of pages of information. It would set a dangerous precedent and put a chill on medical research if we start to micromanage individual NIH grants.

This has worked well over the years. We have had enormous progress because of these grants in achieving medical knowledge and giving the public a better health care system. I do not think this body, this committee, wants to get into the process of reviewing [thousands of] grants ..."

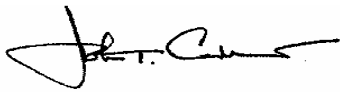
Similarly, during an NIH oversight hearing in June of this year, the Chairman of the Health Subcommittee of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, Representative Michael Bilirakis, said:

[T]he committee is not at all concerned about... [NIH's] peer review process. You all have thousands of reviewers that do tens of thousands probably of peer reviews every year, and I think that's a good system.

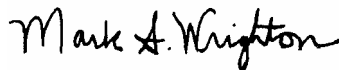
Finally, to make more clear the connection between NIH-supported research and its ultimate purpose, NIH itself has taken steps to ensure that scientists provide NIH (and therefore the public) with information about their public health goals. Specifically, NIH has proposed changes to the research-funding application form that will, pending Office of Management and Budget (OMB) approval, require grant applicants to state the public health benefit of any proposed research. In the near future, NIH, Congress, and the American people will be able to understand much more easily the public health benefits of a particular research proposal.

Eliminating funding of individual NIH grants would undermine vital research as well as the best system for ensuring scientific and fiscal accountability on behalf of the American taxpayer. For our nation's public health, and for the continuing success of the U.S. biomedical research enterprise, we urge you to oppose any amendment that targets individual NIH research grants in this manner.

Sincerely,



John T. Casteen, III  
Chair, AAU  
President  
University of Virginia



Mark S. Wrighton  
Vice Chair, AAU  
Chancellor  
Washington University in St. Louis



Henry S. Bienen



Nancy Cantor

President  
Northwestern University

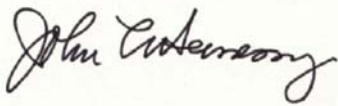
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David B. Frohnmayer  
President  
University of Oregon

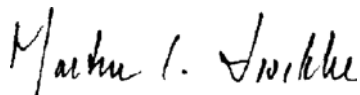
President  
Syracuse University

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Malcolm Gillis".

Malcolm Gillis  
President  
Rice University

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John L. Hennessy".

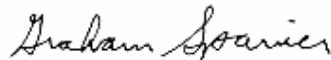
John L. Hennessy  
President  
Stanford University

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martin C. Jischke".

Martin C. Jischke  
President  
Purdue University

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard C. Levin".

Richard C. Levin  
President  
Yale University

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Graham B. Spanier".

Graham B. Spanier  
President  
The Pennsylvania State University

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Shirley M. Tilghman".

Shirley M. Tilghman  
President  
Princeton University

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nils Hasselmo".

Nils Hasselmo  
President  
Association of American Universities

The Association of American Universities (AAU) was founded in 1900 and consists of sixty American and two Canadian universities. AAU institutions perform nearly 60% of federally funded academic research and development.

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