Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 22, 2009

Dr. Ralph J. Cicerone
President
National Academy of Sciences
500 Fifth Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dr. Charles M. Vest
President
National Academy of Engineering
500 Fifth Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dr. Harvey V. Fineberg
President
Institute of Medicine
500 Fifth Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Dr. Cicerone, Dr. Vest, and Dr. Fineberg:

America's research universities are admired throughout the world, and they have contributed immeasurably to our social and economic well-being. Our universities, to an extent unparalleled in other countries, are our Nation's primary source of long-term scientific, engineering, and medical research. We are concerned that they are at risk.

We are writing to ask that the National Academy of Sciences, the National Academy of Engineering, and the Institute of Medicine assemble a distinguished group of individuals to assess the competitive position of American research universities, both public and private, and respond to the following question:

> What are the top ten actions that Congress, state governments, research universities, and others could take to assure the ability of the American research university to maintain the excellence in research and doctoral education needed to help the United States compete, prosper, and achieve national goals for health, energy, the environment, and security in the global community of the 21st century?

American research universities have been critical assets that have laid the groundwork—through research and doctoral education—for the development of many of the competitive advantages that make possible the high American standard of living. But today research universities are under stress, even as other countries are measurably improving the quality of their research institutions. We ask that your report assess the organizational, intellectual, and financial capacity of public and private American research universities relative to research universities internationally.

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We believe that the Academies' report should include an assessment of the relationship, or lack of relationship, of our research universities with other parts of our national research enterprise, including the federally-funded National Laboratories and other federally funded research and development centers. We also believe that the report should take into account the collaborations between universities and privately funded corporate research laboratories and assess what contribution those relationships might make to the Nation's future. And while this report should not focus on the challenges of healthcare reform, this report should address the difficulties faced by medical schools and medical centers that are affiliated with research universities, and the relationships of both with the National Institutes of Health.

This request is a follow-up to the request that a bipartisan group of us made in 2005 when we asked the Academies to identify the key steps needed to ensure a science and technology enterprise that would enable the United States to compete in the global economy of the 21st century. The Academies responded to that request by assembling a distinguished panel, headed by Norman R. Augustine, that quickly produced a list of 20 recommendations along with strategies in the report, "Rising Above the Gathering Storm." Congress enacted and the President signed the "America COMPETES Act" in 2007, incorporating many of the Academies' recommendations and establishing a blueprint for maintaining America's competitive position.

Science and engineering in the last 60 years have fundamentally improved the lives of every person on this globe. The contributions of our research universities cannot be overstated. But many frontiers remain to be explored, and for our children and grandchildren's sake, we cannot let our constellation of universities dim. We are convinced that this report will provide essential guidance for the federal government, states and the universities themselves.

Sincerely,

Barbara A. Mikulski

Barbara Mikulski
United States Senate

Bart Gordon

Bart Gordon
U.S. House of Representatives

Lamar Alexander

Lamar Alexander
United States Senate

Ralph M. Hall

Ralph Hall
U.S. House of Representatives