

September 16, 2008

The Honorable Jim Cooper  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1536 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Cooper:

On behalf of Vanderbilt University and our world-class researchers, I urge you to support increased funding for the science and research programs at the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, the Department of Energy's Office of Science, the Department of Education and the Department of Defense in the FY 2009 Continuing Resolution (CR) to be considered later this month.

These accounts are critical to the innovative research being conducted at Vanderbilt as well as at other leading research institutions in Tennessee and across the nation. Federally-funded research, as emphasized in the bipartisan America COMPETES Act, has served as a catalyst for new products and technologies; created skilled jobs; contributed to economic growth, and most importantly, improved all of our lives. The discoveries resulting from federally-funded basic research are the driving force behind America's competitive edge. We in Tennessee are acutely aware of the importance of research institutions such as Oak Ridge National Laboratory, the University of Tennessee and Vanderbilt to the economic engines of our state.

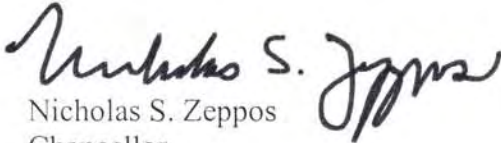
While I am proud to report that federal research funding at Vanderbilt has continued to increase, reaching almost \$500 million in the most recent fiscal year, this cannot continue without sustained growth in the federal investment in basic research. Our nation's progress, competitiveness, social fabric and future depend upon long-term investments made in research and education. If funding continues at current meager levels, these agencies will stagnate and find themselves unable to fund the scientists, faculty and students who conduct research at Vanderbilt and other institutions in our state. Our ability to attract high-tech employers to Tennessee depends on a vibrant university research community and a highly educated workforce.

Last month, the National Science Foundation reported that “federal funding of academic science and engineering R&D failed to outpace inflation for the second year in a row,” – the first time that has ever happened since the NSF began tracking this information in 1972. The NSF’s report went on to observe that while the federal government continues to be the largest source of academic R&D funding, the federal investment has dropped from 64 percent in FY 2005 to 62 percent in FY 2007. This trend is extremely troubling to me and my colleagues at research institutions across the country and is one we simply cannot afford to continue.

I respectfully request that, as a minimum, the administration’s requested funding levels for these research agencies be included in the FY 2009 CR. This level of funding would return us to the path of increased federal research budgets laid out in the America COMPETES Act and has already been supported by the Congress in draft appropriations bills for FY 2009.

Thank you for your efforts on behalf of Vanderbilt and all Tennesseans. We are grateful for your support of science and research funding.

Sincerely,

  
Nicholas S. Zeppos  
Chancellor

NSZ:cn