February 11, 2016

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

Dear Representative Cooper,

As leaders of institutions in the Southeastern Conference (SEC), we thank you for your strong support of federal investments in research and education, as evidenced by your vote in favor of H.R. 2029, the FY 16 Omnibus Appropriations and Tax Extenders Act. We are grateful for the increases provided in that bill for research agencies such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the National Science Foundation (NSF), National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), Department of Defense (DOD) basic research programs, Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Department of Energy’s (DOE) Office of Science, and the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). These investments provide critically important support to students and researchers at our institutions who are working to develop new technologies to improve our economic and national security and serve our country’s needs.

As you can appreciate, sustained, steady growth in our federal research budgets is critical to maintaining our position as the world leader in science and engineering. While recent data from NSF confirms that the United States still invests the most in R&D and produces the most advanced degrees in science and engineering, our Asian competitors are quickly catching up. Between 2003 and 2013, China increased its R&D investments at an average of 19.5 percent annually, greatly exceeding that of the U.S. Investments such as those in the FY 16 Omnibus Appropriations bill are critical to help us maintain our global edge.

Basic research also creates innovations that are then spun off into industry, creating companies and jobs that encourage the economic growth in our states. The federal government is the primary source of funding for basic research (providing over 60 percent of funding), and this basic research is at the root of entrepreneurial efforts to grow new industries and new jobs.

Funding from these federal agencies allow researchers at SEC universities to address national issues through the creation of new and innovative technology. For example, researchers at SEC institutions are developing revolutionary, commercially viable “bionic” prosthetics that allow paraplegics to stand and walk and are creating novel methods to measure the effectiveness of treatments for children with autism. These are but a couple of the many examples of how federal partnerships with SEC universities are contributing to the national interest.

Thank you again for your strong support of research and education. We look forward to continuing to work with you to advance these priorities.

Sincerely,

Dr. F. King Alexander  
President and Chancellor  
Louisiana State University

Dr. Eli Capilouto  
President  
University of Kentucky
Dr. Joe DiPietro  
President  
University of Tennessee

Jere W. Morehead  
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Hank Foley, Ph.D.  
Interim Chancellor  
University of Missouri

Harris Pastides  
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W. Kent Fuchs  
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Michael K. Young  
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Nicholas S. Zeppos  
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