August 8, 2013

The Honorable William L. Clay
United States House of Representatives
2418 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-2501

Dear Representative Clay:

We recently joined over 150 university presidents and chancellors in signing a letter expressing our deep concern about the current state of federal investment in higher education and research. As that letter notes, the erosion of federal investment in research and education, combined with increased investments other nations have made in these areas, has led to a new kind of deficit—an innovation deficit.

Increased, sustained federal investment is critical because the nation’s past investments helped to make the U.S. systems of higher education and competitive basic research the global standard. This focused, long-term strategy has led to the innovations and new technologies that fuel the nation’s economy and create jobs.

As leaders of Missouri research universities, we have had the unique opportunity to observe the impact those commitments have had on universities and economies around the globe. Every year, the international competition to recruit the most talented students, scholars, and researchers becomes fiercer. It is increasingly easy to find foreign laboratories with cutting-edge instrumentation and facilities, enhancing the ability to perform groundbreaking research and to successfully translate discoveries into the marketplace.

Our competitive edge in research, technology development, and implementing technology in the marketplace is being threatened. The decline in federal investment will have serious long-term consequences: a less prepared, less highly skilled U.S. workforce, fewer U.S.-based scientific and technological breakthroughs, fewer U.S.-based patents, and fewer U.S. start-ups, products, and jobs.
This fall, you and other national leaders face critical decisions on the federal budget. We recognize the decisions will not be easy, but the true priorities of any nation are revealed when times are difficult. Our innovation deficit undermines economic growth, which will be reflected in our nation’s overall fiscal health, worsening long-term budget deficits and debt. Investments in research and education are not inconsistent with long-term deficit reduction...they are vital to it.

Missouri and the rest of the nation need your help to ensure that the Federal Government makes robust investments in the future. We need your leadership in the creation of a thoughtful regulatory and legal framework to guide and encourage economic growth and job creation. We need your vocal support for strengthened and sustained federal investment in education and research in order to close this innovation deficit.

We look forward to having you, your staff, and your colleagues engage with us about the importance of our nation having a firm stake in expanding our federal research and development footprint. We can assure you that our universities are maximizing federal investments and we look forward to working with you in order to close this innovation gap.

Sincerely yours,

Timothy M. Wolfe
President
University of Missouri System

Mark S. Wrighton
Chancellor
Washington University in St. Louis

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