

April __, 2005

The Honorable Frank Wolf
Chairman
Subcommittee on Science, State, Justice and
Commerce
H-309 Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Alan Mollohan
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Science, State, Justice and
Commerce
H-309 Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Wolf and Ranking Member Mollohan:

As supporters of fundamental scientific research and education, we respectfully ask that you make the National Science Foundation (NSF) funding a priority and provide \$6.1 billion in your Fiscal Year 2006 Science, State, Justice and Commerce Subcommittee appropriations legislation.

Innovation is the engine that drives our economy. Economists estimate that more than half the economic growth in the past 50 years can be attributed to technological innovation. As other nations are significantly increasing their funding of basic research, the U.S. leadership in science and technology is endangered and cannot be indefinitely taken for granted.

Clearly the government plays a role in innovation, as two-thirds of U.S. patents cite federal funding as their source of support. Federally funded basic research has cultivated groundbreaking technologies, such as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), global positioning systems (GPS), human genome mapping, lasers, fiber optics and many, many more. NSF research supports technologies that are later applied by other agencies, ranging from Doppler radar, which has saved many lives through accurate weather forecasts, to laser-guided weapons, which have revolutionized combat. Recently, NSF has pioneered the developing field of nanotechnology, with innumerable applications to the defense of our nation, improvements in healthcare, and quality of life. Though NSF receives only 4 percent of the total federal research and development budget, it is the bedrock of our scientific strength and provides the basis for innovation and development throughout our economy.

NSF has also been praised as a model of administrative efficiency for its low overhead costs and efficient use of tax dollars—over 95 percent of its funds go directly to support education and research programs.

NSF is a key supporter of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education. In 2004, it supported more than 200,000 students, teachers and researchers—providing essential development for the current and future generations of scientists, engineers

and technical workers. This year that number will drop to 168,000, as NSF budget reductions cut support for undergraduates and K-12 teachers and students. Now, more than ever, we must invest in our children's education to develop their talent, ensure their success, and maintain the quality of our workforce and economic strength. NSF, with its expertise in merit-review awards, is uniquely positioned to contribute to math and science education. NSF education endeavors are complementary to those of the Department of Education, as NSF research provides the foundation for much of the applications promoted by the Department of Education. We should continue to strongly support the educational mission of the NSF.

In the FY 2005 Omnibus Spending Bill (P.L. 108-447), the NSF budget was cut by \$180 million, or \$272 million below the President's request of \$5.75 billion. We must act to restore this cut as well as provide an increase consistent with previous NSF budgets. In 2002, Congress recognized the importance of an investment in basic research by overwhelmingly passing the National Science Foundation Authorization Act (P.L. 107-368) which authorizes doubling the budget of NSF over five years. We realize that budget realities may not allow Congress to fully fund NSF at the FY 2006 authorized level of \$8.5 billion. However, we need to get back on track after the cuts of FY 2005. Therefore, we believe that an increase above the FY 2005 \$5.75 billion request is warranted.

We are mindful that you will be faced with very difficult choices this year. But we must recognize the unique role that NSF funding plays in increasing economic growth in our nation and providing a means to compete successfully against other countries. We respectfully request that you fund NSF at \$6.1 billion for FY 2006. We cannot afford to shortchange the fundamental sciences on which our future and our children's future depend.

Sincerely,