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Contact: Natasha Altamirano
naltamirano@gga.com or 202-429-6882

University Presidents, Senators Discuss Importance of Scientific Research to Economy

Washington, DC – University leaders and U.S. Senators gathered for a roundtable discussion today at the Capitol on the vital role university-based scientific research plays in fueling innovation and sparking economic growth.

The event was organized by the Senate Democratic Steering and Outreach Committee, chaired by Sen. Mark Begich (D-AK), and included participation by Sens. Daniel Akaka (HI), Benjamin Cardin (MD), Kay Hagan (NC), Bernard Sanders (VT), and Debbie Stabenow (MI) and the following university leaders: Joseph Aoun, president of Northeastern University in Boston, Mass.; James Clements, president of West Virginia University; Daniel Fogel, president of the University of Vermont; Allan Gilmour, president of Wayne State University in Detroit, Mich.; Michael Johns, chancellor of Emory University in Atlanta, Ga.; Wallace Loh, president of the University of Maryland; Samuel Stanley, president of Stony Brook University in Long Island, NY; and Randy Woodson, chancellor of North Carolina State University. The universities are members of The Science Coalition.

The university leaders discussed the many ways in which federally funded university-based research helps fuel the economy – from being local economic engines to helping drive industrial innovation to enabling America to compete in the global economy.

“Our system of higher education and research has been the envy of the world,” said Wallace Loh, president of the University of Maryland. “Federally funded university research has been a driving force in our economy since World War II and has helped the U.S. lead the world in science, technology and innovation that make a difference in our lives. However, other nations are watching and emulating us,” he said. “They realize that research universities are a fundamental component of an innovation economy. We risk losing our competitive edge because we are pulling back at precisely the time that other nations are investing heavily in scientific research.”

According to Wayne State University President Allan Gilmour, research universities play an essential role in driving innovation that can reshape old industries and create entirely new ones. “I arrived at Wayne State just in time for our university to be called on to help our city and our state create a new economy,” said Gilmour, a former Vice Chairman of the Ford Motor Company. “Our university is being asked to help attract companies to the region. Because Detroit is at the epicenter of a necessary transition and key to that transition will be research.”

The discussion occurred as the Congress and the White House worked to negotiate an agreement to fund the government through the remainder of the fiscal year. Federal funding for scientific research is among the government programs targeted for significant reduction under certain budget-cutting scenarios.

Samuel L. Stanley Jr., M.D., President of Stony Brook University acknowledged the wisdom of the long-standing partnership between the federal government and U.S. research universities which was forged during World War II to conduct research on behalf of the American people. “We cannot let the current efforts at budget reduction derail what has been arguably the most successful investing partnership in the world,” cautioned Dr. Stanley. “Funding to universities through the National Institutes of Health, National Science Foundation, Department of Energy, and the



Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency has created jobs, improved health domestically and around the world, and helped create the technological advances that have fundamentally changed the human condition.”

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The Science Coalition is a non-profit, nonpartisan organization of the nation’s leading public and private research universities. It is dedicated to maintaining strong federal funding of basic scientific research as a means to stimulate the economy, drive innovation and secure America’s global competitiveness. Learn more at www.sciencecoalition.org. Learn how federally funded university research creates innovations, new companies and jobs at www.sciencecoalition.org/successstories/.