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University Experts Agree: Federal Funding For Fundamental Science Research Reaps Economic Benefits

Member Institutions of The Science Coalition Highlight the Economic and Societal Impacts of Fundamental Science Research

WASHINGTON – Last week, The Science Coalition (TSC) and Association of American Universities (AAU) hosted their annual roundtable discussion with senior research officers from top U.S. universities. The event focused on "The Economic Impact of Fundamental Scientific Research," and experts agreed federal funding for fundamental science research is key in order for the United States to maintain its leadership as an economic powerhouse.

University leaders continue to find ways to bolster the pipeline from research to innovation, and further grow America's competitive economic advantage:

> As Neil Sharkey **of The Pennsylvania State University** argued, "fundamental science really drives what we do…but we're really paying attention to take those fundamental discoveries and bring them to the marketplace."
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> Jill Pipher **of Brown University** said that Brown's research "investments have attracted new industry and expanded existing industry presences. We understand clearly that a dynamic and entrepreneurial ecosystem is in all of our best interests."

On the local level, university research programs have major impacts on communities:

> Jerry Blazey **of Northern Illinois University** remarked that, "all research universities, whether well-established or emerging, have a shared role in strengthening local economies across the country."
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> Chris Molloy **of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey,** said that "research and economic development is a major mission for New Jersey – the state with the most scientists per square mile. Rutgers' research over the past decade has launched more than 80 new companies."

Fundamental research has increasingly led to industry growth and spin-out companies that commercialize the scientific breakthroughs achieved on university campuses:

> As Chris Keane **of Washington State University** noted, "my university is very proud to be a key part of the innovation pipeline for the agriculture industry in the state."

> Terri Fiez **of University of Colorado Boulder** gave a spin-out company example from 1956 – "The spinout was Ball Aerospace. That was an early seed for Colorado becoming the second largest aerospace economy in the country. We've had 87 spinouts since 1994, and 67 of them *still* exist."

Additionally, the need for robust and consistent federal funding for fundamental research is a top concern for university leaders:

> Mark Barteau **of Texas A&M University** noted, "as administrations change we see things swing between fundamental research and more applied research, and the fact is we need all of it. A more consistent federal policy, less subject to the swings in Washington, would be of great benefit."

> David Conover **of University of Oregon** remarked that, "the National Science Foundation (NSF) has been the principal federal source for curiosity-driven basic research. If you look at what NSF funds today versus two decades ago, it has moved in the applied science direction. While this reflects changing national priorities and is therefore understandable, we must be vigilant and make sure that the primary mission of NSF remains the funding of fundamental research."

University senior research officers made clear that fundamental scientific research is important not just for its economic benefits, but also for what it provides society at large:

> Padma Raghavan **of Vanderbilt University** stressed that, "the aim of basic research is not to make money, it's to improve the quality of life and benefit society. And commercialization can be a means to that end, but it's not an end in itself. The benefits of federally funded research are out there, and we need to keep that in mind."

> Rodolfo Torres **of University of Kansas** noted that, "when you work on translational or already applied research it's like making a key for a particular door. But when you are working on basic fundamental research, it's like making a master key -- you are creating the key that will open many doors, even those that we don't know we need to open."

Representing member institutions of The Science Coalition and Association for American Universities, these senior research officers work daily to grow critical fundamental science research programs on their campuses in order to drive scientific discovery and hopefully produce life-changing innovations. They are available for comment on university-based science research, as well as on the need for growing federal investment in these critical programs.

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About The Science Coalition

Established in 1994, The Science Coalition is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization of more than 50 of the nation's leading public and private research universities. It is dedicated to sustaining the federal government's investment in basic scientific research as a means to stimulate the economy, spur innovation, and drive America's global competitiveness.