February 22, 2018

The Coalition for National Security Research (CNSR) is a broad-based alliance of research universities and institutes, scientific and professional organizations, and non-profits committed to advocating for a strong Defense Science & Technology enterprise.

Dear Chairwoman Granger, Chairman Cochran, and Ranking Members Visclosky and Durbin,

The 2018 National Defense Strategy acknowledges that the longstanding competitive advantage the American military has enjoyed is eroding. Adversaries challenge us in every domain, but we arguably face our greatest challenge in the realm of technology. The Administration’s National Security Strategy says, “Losing our innovation and technological edge would have negative implications for American prosperity and power.” On behalf of the Coalition for National Security Research (CNSR), a broad-based alliance of the nation’s top research universities and institutes, scientific and professional organizations, and non-profits, we urge you to provide robust funding for the Department of Defense (DOD) science and technology (S&T) program—with emphasis on the enclosed program elements (PEs)—as you allocate additional funding made available under the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018.

Before Congress reached this agreement, the House and Senate each drafted fiscal year (FY) 2018 DOD appropriations bills that would cut this important research overall. We are concerned that these cuts would harm technological developments critical to maintaining our military superiority across the land, sea, and air. Of particular concern are certain funding levels in both bills, including the Senate’s reduction to total basic research and especially Army and Air Force S&T. And although the House bill includes a small, positive increase for total basic research, these gains are not distributed equitably, and the Army S&T program actually would take a devastating hit. Pioneering scientific breakthroughs and engineering technologies for the 21st century warfighter requires stable, consistent investment in all branches of the military.

Despite these concerning, potentially damaging cuts, there are specific aspects of both chambers’ bills whose funding levels we believe should serve as positive foundations. Among these are the House’s restoring lost funding in Naval research, and the Senate’s further supporting the National Defense Education Program (NDEP) and Defense-Wide Manufacturing Science and Technology Program. NDEP includes funding for the Manufacturing Engineering Education Program as well as other activities that are vital to ensuring we have a robust science and engineering workforce. The DOD-sponsored Manufacturing USA Institutes are funded through the Defense-Wide Manufacturing Science and Technology Program. The institutes support the
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industrial base by bridging the so-called commercialization “valley of death” for photonic-enabled semiconductors, supporting workforce development, and providing small businesses and start-ups with access to software, hardware, and expertise to which they would not otherwise have access.

Federal investment in these DOD S&T programs is a proven path to discovery and innovation. With it in the past, we developed night vision, stealth technology, precision munitions, unmanned underwater vehicles, military drones, and global positioning technology that shifted the military paradigm. If we are to overcome our current and future challenges, Congress must continue to support the S&T programs across all branches of the military and especially in basic research.

Without sustained investment in these programs, we risk losing the progress we have made to address current threats and develop the military technologies of the future. Advancements are being made in laser systems that can engage small enemy aircraft or stop rockets, artillery, and mortars at the speed of light. DOD-sponsored research is enhancing composite materials for armor panels and using additive manufacturing to address lifecycle costs. DOD basic research is securing the military’s future edge in areas such as quantum computation and communications, bio-inspired low energy information processing, photonics materials, additive 3D self-assembly materials, artificial intelligence and advanced autonomous systems.

Finally, the 2018 National Defense Strategy says, “We cannot expect success fighting tomorrow’s conflicts with yesterday’s weapons or equipment.” CNSR wholeheartedly agrees. It is absolutely critical that Congress support DOD’s S&T program and basic research that provide the resources to maintain our technical superiority over our adversaries.

We thank you for your commitment to American security and prosperity. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of any service to you.

Sincerely,

John Latini
Chairman
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