



December 9, 2005

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

My colleagues and I on the Board of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) urge you, the Administration, and the Congress to mount a concerted effort to sustain the Nation's innovation capacity and thereby its economic competitiveness in an increasingly challenging, knowledge-based, global economy. The AAAS is the nation's largest general scientific organization, representing 127,000 members directly and about 10 million scientists and engineers through our affiliates.

Just this week the Department of Commerce hosted, in conjunction with other Cabinet departments and business organizations, the National Summit on Competitiveness: Investing in U.S. Innovation. One input was the December 2004 report on innovation from the Council on Competitiveness. Meanwhile, the National Academies of Sciences and Engineering and the Institute of Medicine responded expeditiously this fall to a specific request from Senators Alexander, Domenici, and others to develop urgent, specific, long-term recommendations in the report called "Rising Above the Gathering Storm: Energizing and Employing America for a Brighter Economic Future". That report, chaired by industrialist Norman Augustine, a member of the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology, was developed by a group of corporate leaders, university presidents and other educators, and leading scientists. The specific recommendations deserve consideration.

Just as the Administration has successfully advocated long-term certainty about tax policies to encourage investment by companies and individuals, the nation looks to the Administration and Congress to make a difference in our capacity to lead globally. We strongly support these actions:

- Enhance budgets for fundamental research
- Invest in a far better-prepared, better educated domestic workforce
- Improve accessibility and receptivity to international students, scientists, and engineers, from whom our Nation has benefited for decades
- Create and expand incentives for innovation.

Executive Office

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We recognize, as has the Administration, the importance of a broad, balanced portfolio of R&D investments, given the increasing interdependence of physical, biological, behavioral, and social sciences and their application to technological advances for societal benefit. We need to invest more in the kind of high-risk breakthrough research that universities and national laboratories are uniquely qualified to conduct. While corporate research has increased over the past few decades, fewer and fewer firms are able or willing to justify broad basic research on which they readily admit that they depend. We do not want to put our country and our knowledge-based, technology-driven economy in the position of "catch-up".

Likewise, we share the broad national concern about the teaching and learning of K-12 math and science. For 20 years the AAAS has led efforts to achieve understanding and skills through "Science for All Americans" and National Benchmarks utilized throughout the country. We are deeply concerned by the country's chronic inability to attract enough students into fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. As we improve education, we need to ensure that America remains the best place to locate research facilities, conduct R&D, create new enterprises, and find good jobs. The AAAS would be pleased to assist.

We are still in a position of global leadership. The challenge is to take action now throughout the Administration, in the Congress and, if appropriate, in your upcoming State of the Union address to advance the innovation agenda.

Our warm wishes for the Holiday Season and a productive and satisfying New Year.

Sincerely yours,


Gilbert S. Omenn
President, AAAS