Statement on the Critical Importance of Supporting the U.S. Research Enterprise During the COVID-19 Pandemic

While there are many difficult decisions being made by colleges and universities across the nation to advance their vital missions this fall, the $55 billion in on-campus research that is the global gold standard and seed corn for future U.S. innovation is at risk. This is the same research enterprise that enabled the rapid sequencing of the COVID-19 genome and launched numerous treatment and vaccine studies. As such, maintaining the strength of the U.S. research enterprise must be a national priority. Laboratories must remain open and researchers must be allowed to continue data collection and analysis, with all the necessary health protocols in place. We cannot afford to shut down critical projects with long-term national benefits and that provide the hands-on graduate and undergraduate student research experiences necessary to train the next generation of scientists and engineers who will drive U.S. innovation and societal progress. In these most difficult times, we call upon Washington to provide the leadership, critical funding, and programmatic flexibility necessary to enable the nation's colleges and universities to continue the American commitment to research, exploration, and new knowledge creation that will power our economy and provide opportunity for all.

Signed by University Leadership Forum Members

Dr. Michael M. Crow  
University Vice-chair  
Council on Competitiveness  
President  
Arizona State University  

Mr. Jonathan Alger  
President  
James Madison University  

Dr. Michael Amiridis  
Chancellor  
University of Illinois at Chicago  

Dr. Dennis Assanis  
President  
University of Delaware  

Dr. Eric Barron  
President  
Pennsylvania State University  

Dr. Mark P. Becker  
President  
Georgia State University  

The Honorable Rebecca M. Blank  
Chancellor  
University of Wisconsin—Madison  

Dr. Gene D. Block  
Chancellor  
University of California, Los Angeles  

Dr. Lee C. Bollinger  
President  
Columbia University  

Dr. Robert A. Brown  
President  
Boston University  

Ms. Sylvia M. Burwell  
President  
American University  

Mr. C. Michael Cassidy  
Director, Emory Biomedical Catalyst  
Emory University  

Dr. James P. Clements  
President  
Clemson University  

Dr. Steven Currall  
President  
University of South Florida  

Dr. John J. DeGioia  
President  
Georgetown University  

Dr. Julio Frenk  
President  
University of Miami  

Dr. W. Kent Fuchs  
President  
University of Florida  

Dr. Joan T.A. Gabel  
President  
University of Minnesota  

The Honorable Patrick D. Gallagher  
Chancellor  
University of Pittsburgh  

Dr. E. Gordon Gee  
President  
West Virginia University  

Dr. Eric Isaacs  
President  
Carnegie Institute for Science  

Dr. Lloyd A. Jacobs  
Former President  
University of Toledo  

Dr. Farnam Jahanian  
President  
Carnegie Mellon University
Background

Colleges and universities are critical components of the U.S. innovation ecosystem, called upon to play ever-evolving roles in building talent for a changing workforce; achieving scientific breakthroughs; creating new technologies, products, and companies; and contributing to local economic development. Yet, as the pace of change accelerates across our economy, federal and state budget constraints have made meeting these expectations ever more challenging. The federal commitment to research and development stands at a multidecadal low as a percentage of GDP. Now, in addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted almost all aspects of higher education, including the ability to keep laboratories open, conduct research in a timely manner, collect and process data, and collaborate with colleagues and students.

About the University Leadership Forum

Chaired by Michael Lovell, president of Marquette University and Jere Morehead, president of the University of Georgia, the Forum brings together more than 50 of the Council’s college and university leaders from a variety of institutions and backgrounds, as well as key leaders representing the Council’s corporate, national lab, and labor members. Participants are developing agendas to set the future of innovation for university leadership through the lens of U.S. competitiveness.

About the Council on Competitiveness

In a time of ever accelerating technological change and business transformation, the Council on Competitiveness promotes policies and conducts programs to stimulate U.S. productivity and grow America’s economy. The Council’s membership is diverse and nonpartisan, representing the major sectors of the economy—CEOs, university presidents, labor leaders and national laboratory directors.