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January 16, 2009

The Honorable David R. Obey, Chairman
U. S. House of Representatives
House Appropriations Committee
H-218 Capitol
Washington, DC 20515-6015

Dear Chairman Obey:

I write on behalf of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities' 430 public colleges and university members to commend and thank you and Speaker Pelosi (D-CA) for your extraordinary efforts in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Bill of 2009 to advance our public policy commitment to access, affordability and educational opportunity.

For more than 3.5 million students enrolled in AASCU institutions, representing 56 percent of the enrollment at all public four-year institutions, an immediate \$500 increase in the Pell Grant maximum award is a boost in funding that is deeply appreciated and clearly needed. At \$5,350, this maximum award would cover 80 percent of the average tuition and fees of public four-year institutions and improve the chances for students to enroll in college and graduate.

Many of these provisions in the bill reflect suggestions made by AASCU and other higher education associations. In addition to the substantial investment in the federal Pell Grant program, I want to recognize the proposal for increasing the Teacher Quality Enhancement Grants in Title II to \$100 million. Since AASCU institutions prepare more than 50 percent of all teachers in the United States, making this program a priority for funding is long overdue and especially appreciated by us as we continue our efforts to improve teacher quality.

Your efforts to provide \$6 billion for higher education renovation and modernization to be distributed to the states would provide welcome relief for states that are suffering from the current economic condition and would make targeted funding available to build 21st century classrooms. The allocation of \$79 billion in direct fiscal relief, including \$39 billion to local school districts and public colleges and universities, distributed through existing state and federal formulas will fulfill critical state priorities that would have otherwise been deferred or eliminated. We applaud your proposal to make another \$25 billion available for other high priority needs. In addition, the legislation contains \$6 billion for wireless and broadband grants that will help connect students and families living in underserved areas with educational and job opportunities.

Finally, AASCU applauds your action to make \$8 billion in increased funding of research available, including \$3 billion for the National Science Foundation. A \$2 billion investment in energy efficiency research and renewable energy will spur research efforts that have been postponed or simply taken off the table.

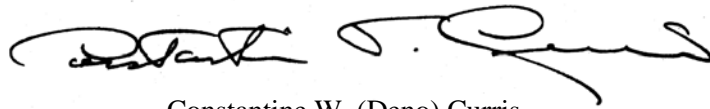
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The National Institutes of Health would benefit immeasurably from a \$3 billion increase for biomedical and basic energy studies.

I thank President-elect Obama for offering our public sector presidents and chancellors the opportunity to present their ideas to the transition team and, through them, to the Congress.

I thank you for your strong leadership and commitment to our nation's college students and the higher education institutions. I urge you to move quickly as you meet to take up this legislation knowing that congressional leadership and the Obama team move assiduously to enact a final stimulus bill for America.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Constantine W. Curris', written in a cursive style.

Constantine W. (Deno) Curris
President

cc: Speaker Nancy Pelosi