



Testimony of Peter McPherson, President, Association of Public and Land-grant Universities  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related  
Agencies  
Public Witness Hearing  
Wednesday, March 8, 2017

Chairman Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro, and members of the Subcommittee, it is an honor to join you this morning to testify on the critical importance of federal student aid and university-based research to the economic growth, competitiveness, and health and wellbeing of our country. More specifically, I will talk about the need to ensure the strength of the Pell grant program, including through the restoration of year-round Pell grants, and boost funding for the National Institutes of Health by \$2 billion.

I am president of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, a membership association consisting of 194 public research universities, land-grant institutions, and state university systems across the country. Every member of Congress has an APLU member institution in their congressional district or state. Our U.S. member universities annually enroll 5.2 million undergraduate and graduate students and conduct \$40.7 billion in university-based research.

As the United States has emerged slowly from the Great Recession, what has become increasingly clear is that a college degree is even more essential to employment than before. Of the 11.6 million jobs created after the Great Recession, 11.5 million went to people with some college education. The unemployment rate for bachelor's degree holders is just 2.5 percent. Not only are degree holders finding jobs more easily, the jobs are delivering a lifetime of greater benefits to the individual and tremendous

public benefits to the economy and society.

Bachelor's degree holders on average earn nearly \$1 million more in their lifetime than high school graduates. College graduates are also considerably less reliant on government programs and services including Medicaid, housing subsidies, nutrition aid, unemployment benefits, and other forms of public assistance. For instance, those who graduated college are 3.5 times less likely to be impoverished and nearly five times less likely to be imprisoned.

Combined with state investment in public higher education, federal student aid is the lynchpin for higher education access. Pell Grants are often the determining factor in whether a low-income student can afford to go to college. For example, at APLU's three Oklahoma member institutions, the University of Oklahoma, Oklahoma State University, and Langston University, more than 12,000 low-income students participate in the Pell program. At the University of Connecticut, nearly four thousand Pell students were enrolled in the 2014-15 academic year.

APLU urges the Subcommittee to support appropriations necessary to maintain the projected increase in the maximum Pell Grant, at a minimum maintain present levels of discretionary appropriations, and protect the Pell surplus for the long-term fiscal health of the program. Congress should also make permanent annual Pell inflation adjustments, which currently expire after 2017.

The Subcommittee also has a great opportunity to improve Pell Grants by restoring year-round Pell. The Senate Fiscal Year 2017 Labor-H bill would critically restore this program. While the House Subcommittee declined to include year-round Pell during its FY17 markup, we appreciate that Chairman Cole noted a final agreement could still include year-round Pell. I urge the Subcommittee not to pass on this opportunity in FY17 or FY18 if necessary. Restoring year-round Pell would greatly contribute to so

many bipartisan higher education goals. By allowing students to use their Pell eligibility over the summer, the subcommittee would help students graduate sooner, with less debt, and enter the workforce more quickly. Numerous studies have shown that uninterrupted academic progress boosts graduation rates. We also know that the single greatest determining factor of whether a student will successfully repay loans is whether they complete their degree. Year-round Pell is just common sense from all standpoints: students who want to stay on a fast track for graduation; their colleges and universities that support student progress; and the federal government, which also has a great interest in their success. Just last week Speaker Ryan joined the chorus of those voicing their support for year-round Pell.

Another top priority for APLU within the jurisdiction of the Subcommittee is robust funding for the National Institutes of Health. For FY18, we join the greater medical research community in requesting that the Subcommittee provide NIH a \$2 billion increase over the FY17 appropriated amount.

APLU universities conduct much of the NIH-sponsored research. This research has immediate economic benefits, including providing high quality jobs across the country. According to an analysis by United for Medical Research, NIH research funding in 2015 directly and indirectly supported over 350,000 jobs nationwide and generated \$60.171 billion in new economic activity. Seventeen states experienced an economic gain of \$1 billion or more in 2015 due to NIH research.

The economic benefits of strong NIH funding play out not only immediately, but also for years to come. It is no secret that a key ingredient to achieving strong economic growth in the U.S. is a consistent and robust investment in science and research.

Of course, we all know that the primary objective for investing in NIH is the long-term advantages of its research. Cures and therapies for diseases and treatments for injuries are priceless. The biomedical

research community continues to move closer to breaking the codes of Alzheimer's, cancer, and other diseases that have taken far too many lives and brought despair to families in every community. Robust funding for NIH is necessary to continue the progress and build on the momentum of the research advances to date.

APLU and our universities greatly appreciate your Subcommittee's support for NIH. The funding increase provided in FY16 was the beginning of what we hope will be a sustained effort to catch up from a decade of stagnant funding for the agency. The FY17 proposals to grow the NIH budget are still pending, and we look forward to a resolution of the current year appropriations bills that will include a \$2 billion increase for this premier biomedical research agency. To continue the scientific breakthroughs and achieve the great promises of addressing the health needs of people across the country, this boost must also continue in FY18.

Thank you for this opportunity to share with you a couple of the major priorities APLU has within your Subcommittee's jurisdiction. We reiterate our appeal that Congress complete the FY17 appropriations process with legislation that prioritizes funding for higher education and research -- investments that yield strong economic and societal returns. We are ready to serve as a resource as you move forward with the FY18 process.