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October 14, 2013

The Honorable John Lewis
343 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Lewis:

The prolonged partial shutdown of our federal government combined with the ongoing sequester is having short and long term impacts on life-saving biomedical research. Emory University received \$333.8 million in federal funding for research in 2013, the majority for biomedical research, and is the leading recipient in Georgia of NIH research funding.

Additionally, as the second largest non-government employer in the state, we are proud of Emory having the only NCI-designated cancer center in Georgia. We continue to work closely with our research partners in Georgia, such as our neighbors, Georgia Tech, Morehouse School of Medicine, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in pursuit of critical breakthroughs in research in biomedical engineering and other domains to improve the quality of life for Georgians, the nation, and the world.

For the purposes of this letter, I will focus on the shutdown and its immediate real-time and real-life results. In addition, should the government remain closed and the debt ceiling increase remain stalled, concerns in both the health and non-health academic programs for our students and faculty will come into sharper focus in terms of federal student aid and related topics.

To be sure, our nation's fiscal challenges are substantial and real. I respect the strong and sharp feelings in Congress that closely mirror the nation's views. I will further address these issues, and Emory's commitment to be part of the ongoing debate and, hopefully, the solution.

While understanding the importance of the issues and the divided political and philosophical contrasts at both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue, and with the shutdown in its 14th day and the paramount need to address the debt ceiling increase, I want to provide you with information on the significant consequences to Emory research and our patients from the shut down and the need to re-open the government.

The partial shutdown and its effects:

Previous biomedical research support of Emory investigators has led to life saving discoveries in traumatic brain injury, cardiac image interpretations, new target discovery for Parkinson's disease, new therapies for HIV, unraveling of the Fragile X Syndrome as a cause of childhood disability, new approaches to prevent transplantation rejection, new vaccines, and new therapies for cancer and depression.

This list is long and not exhaustive. The continued assaults on our biomedical research program will delay future advances that can save lives, have significant negative economic impact, and send a strong message of the lack of federal support to the next generation of biomedical investigators.

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Consequences:

- After a week of the shutdown, the major communications links for the federal agencies regarding biomedical research, for example through the eRA Commons system of NIH, have been disrupted.
- No action can be taken in Commons, and grant submissions, progress reports, and requests are delayed.
- Reviews of submitted applications will not occur or will be delayed; opportunities for new federal funding programs are not being issued; and new awards are not being made.
- Grants.gov, a central communications link, is operating at limited capacity. After several days of delay Clinicaltrials.gov has reopened, and new registrations are being accepted. That said, this site is not at its full operating capacity.
- NIH program contact personnel are not available; CDC import permits for research reagents are not currently possible; and at least one CDC-sponsored study at Emory has been halted by a stop work order.
- Previously funded and already initiated federal clinical trials at Emory are continuing. However, NIH employees who support these trials are not available, and this is creating barriers to patient enrollment in these vital studies designed to improve disease outcomes.
- Most of Emory's Winship Cancer Institute's clinical trials conducted with National Cancer Institute support are open if they are conducted through non-federal groups or consortia. Nevertheless, it is an un-level field. The clinical trials requiring NCI randomization and registration are open, if these processes are automated, but some trials have had to close. The lack of availability of these trials can affect the health and outlook of the cancer patients we care for at Winship.
- The Winship Cancer Institute has submitted four new trial concepts or amendments to the National Cancer Institute since the shutdown. They now languish on the back burner until the shutdown ends.
- The continued shutdown accelerates the impact on investigators and research institutions through missed grant deadlines; missed grant reviews; delay of new and continuation awards; limited federal programmatic interactions; and a backlog of reporting and regulatory issues.
- Research and funding of research will be increasingly impacted. Lengthy delays can create wide gaps in ongoing research programs due to delays in committed funds.
- The federal government shutdown and federal sequester are additive and cumulative blows to biomedical research in this country.

I realize that you are hearing from hundreds of thousands of constituents with their strongly held perspectives ranging from keeping government shuttered and not increasing the debt limit to reopening the government and increasing the debt limit for a twelve month period. As you seek a path forward, I am grateful for this opportunity to share the above comments.

My colleagues and I at Emory are ready to support and work with you to resolve these questions with responsible and long term answers with everything on the table, including reforming the sequester process; entitlement, defense, and non-defense discretionary spending; and revenue policies that support and enable long term economic growth.

I know that you and your staff are performing at a high level under difficult circumstances, and I commend you and them for your service to our country. Should you or your staff wish to discuss any of these matters, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Wright Caughman M.D.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

S. Wright Caughman, M.D.