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## Toward a New Partnership

With the fireworks spent and the tall ships back in home ports, we enter both the nation's third century and the second century of the American university. Unfortunately, after 100 years of coexistence, our universities and the federal government have reached what I believe is a mutually counterproductive stage in their relationship.

Recently, President Harold L. Enarson of Ohio State University addressed the Ohio congressional delegation on this subject. Some of his remarks are particularly appropriate to members of our science community: "A fundamental change is taking place in the relationship between Washington and the nation's colleges and universities, a change which I find deeply disturbing. Once we were partners working together to solve national problems. Now we view each other with suspicion, almost as adversaries. We overregulate on one hand and overreact on the other. We have placed our partnership in peril. And if it is to be restored, it urgently needs our attention and understanding."

These are strong words, but I hear them echoed by my colleagues in universities across the land. From my own campus vantage point, the idea and the substance of our partnership with the federal government are being eroded in two specific ways. First, federal policy is being formulated which, wittingly or unwittingly, undermines the independence that has always been the fundamental strength of American universities. For example, several bills pending in the Congress pertaining to federal funding of medical education contain provisions that may require ill-conceived changes in curriculum as a condition of award. While we are hopeful that these provisions will be omitted in the conference committee, the fact that they survived through both houses of Congress indicates the decline in trust in our relationship with the federal government.

A second factor eroding the partnership is manifested in the administrative procedures being developed to implement federal policy. For example, narrower and narrower interpretations by federal auditors have turned the straightforward principle of overhead or indirect cost recovery on federal grants and contracts into a maze of procedures that work against the very policies they are supposed to implement. The result in this instance is transforming what was once a *joint venture* with joint federal and university contributions into a federal "buyers' market."

The formulation of federal policy is a factor we can deal with much more effectively than we can with increasingly narrow procedural interpretations. Broad policy in fields such as science and health are debated and scrutinized openly in the Congress. I believe we can rebuild the partnership in this open area. However, our task is more difficult when administrative procedures are formulated and interpreted behind closed doors, and then issued without university input and usually without warning. True, many times the procedural changes and new interpretations are narrow in scope. Over time, however, their cumulative effect can change or even destroy fundamental policies that are critical to maintaining a strong science effort.

Having spent some time as a federal agency head myself, I recognize the need for guidelines to carry out the mandates of Congress and to ensure that public funds are expended in a rational and constructive manner. We all recognize that a reasonable level of federal regulation must be tolerated if we are to be the beneficiaries of federal resources. Colleges and universities must be accountable for their use of public funds and an agency has every right to expect such accountability. At the same time, we have every right to expect the independence necessary to carry out the work for which the funds were appropriated in the first place.—WILLIAM D. McELROY, Chancellor, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla 92093