

NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
4201 WILSON BOULEVARD ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA 22230



OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

May 31, 2006

Dr. Anita K. Jones
Chair
c/o Polar Research Board
The National Academies
Keck Building, Room 7521
500 Fifth Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20001
Dear Dr. Jones:

The National Science Foundation was tasked in 1971 by the National Security Council, Memorandum 71, to manage the USAP on behalf of the United States government. In 1982 President Reagan reaffirmed, in PM6646, the national policy underlying the United States Antarctic Program. PM6646 states: "Every effort shall be made to manage the program in a manner that maximizes the cost effectiveness and return on investment."

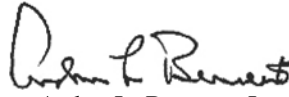
in addition, the President specifically tasked NSF to continue to:

- 1) draw upon logistics support capabilities of government agencies on a cost reimbursable basis. The Department of Transportation, the then provider of the USCG icebreakers, is specifically asked to provide effective and responsive logistics support on a reimbursable basis that has minimal cost.
- 2) use commercial support and management facilities where these are determined to be cost effective

In recent years the rapidly declining reliability of the USCG icebreakers has made it increasingly difficult for the USAP to depend on these ships for its icebreaking services. Over the past two years NSF has needed to invest significant funding to repair the USCG icebreakers with the hopes that they can operate relatively maintenance-free for another two years. These costs have put substantial strains on the Foundation's ability to fund cutting edge polar science, particularly in the Antarctic. At the same time NSF deemed it prudent to seek and procure commercial icebreaking services as a contingency against mechanical casualties to the USCG ships. The fact that a contract ship was available, and was also substantially less expensive than the services provided by the USCG, suggests that privatizing the USAP icebreaking services may provide *good* value to the American people.

In an independent review of the USAP by the National Science and Technology Council (1996), NSF was praised for its effective management of the USAP, "especially ... by privatizing some operational elements of that Program to reduce costs". Given the rapidly escalating costs of government providers for icebreaking services and the uncertain availability of USCG icebreakers beyond the next two years, it is NSF's intention to continue in its long tradition of sound fiscal management of the USAP by seeking competitive bids for icebreaking services that support the broad goals of the USAP. This competition will be open to commercial, government, and international service providers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Arden L. Bement, Jr.", written in a cursive style.

Arden L. Bement, Jr.
Director

cc: Ms. Maria Uhle, NAS/PRB
Mr. David Trinkle, OMB
Dr. Kathie L. Olsen, NSF