EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20502

July 15, 2010

Dr. Cora B. Marrett
Acting Director
The National Science Foundation
4201 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington, VA 22230

Dear Dr. Marrett,

The President strongly supports the U.S. Antarctic Program and understands its importance in America's conduct of international diplomacy, polar scientific endeavors, science leadership, and exploration of this vast continent and its surrounding seas. He also clearly sees the significance of understanding the impacts of climate change on Antarctica, which have national and global implications.

The U.S. Antarctic Program has been effectively managed by the National Science Foundation (NSF) for over half a century, confirming our leadership role and commitment to an active and influential presence in the Antarctic through many successful major scientific endeavors. The infrastructure and logistical support for these endeavors have served the U.S. well, but, as you know, scientific needs in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean are changing for multiple reasons, including from the impacts of global change, which are amplified at the poles. Given these changing scientific drivers, it is prudent for the new Administration to review the U.S. Antarctic Program with regard to the breadth and future landscape of changing U.S. scientific endeavors in Antarctica and their logistical support and infrastructure needs.

To this end, and in order for the United States to advance its goals and international diplomacy and leadership in Antarctica, I request that NSF initiate an independent review of the program to be conducted by two separate, but complementary panels. The first panel, led by the National Research Council (NRC), should identify and summarize the changes to important science conducted on Antarctica and the surrounding Southern Ocean that will demand attention over the next two decades. The second, independent blue ribbon panel, should use the results from the NRC panel to review and make recommendations on the operational plans needed to deliver future Antarctic science. The NRC panel should aim, specifically, to assess the anticipated types and scope of future U.S. scientific endeavors and international scientific collaborations over an ~20-year period in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean; while the blue ribbon panel should evaluate the status and capabilities of NSF's current Antarctic infrastructure; examine appropriate opportunities for international Antarctic logistic, and infrastructure collaborations; examine the role of and future requirements for permanent stations, remote camps, mobile stations, ships, and aircraft support; and review the management and logistics support options required for this projected suite of scientific operations. The blue ribbon panel should also examine the appropriate amount of R&D and complementary scientific activities

(e.g. satellite missions) needed to make Antarctic activities most productive and affordable over the long term.

These panels should have some shared membership to ensure good communication, consistency, and interaction. Both panels should work closely with NSF, seek input from Congress, the White House, the academic community, non-governmental organizations, and international partners. While the studies are ongoing, NSF should continue its current U.S. Antarctic Program activities including those in support of other agencies.

For 50 years, the U.S. Antarctic Research Program (now the U.S. Antarctic Program) has enabled studies that have enlightened us about the beauty and vastness of Antarctica, its role in global change, and its ecological and environmental processes. This work has placed the U.S. in a position of scientific and diplomatic leadership in Antarctica and serves as a model for international scientific collaboration. The results of these reviews will help ensure that NSF and the United States continue to lead in these roles in the decades to come.

Sincerely,

John P. Holdren
Director