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9 May 2012

Dear Colleague and CAP Member,

I am writing to let you know that the CAP Executive is very concerned by recent developments with regard to research funding and related issues at NSERC and the NRC. Upon becoming aware of the recent NSERC decision to ramp down the RTI program and place the MRS program under moratorium, I called a special meeting of the CAP Executive to decide on our course of action. Last week I spoke with Isabelle Blain, NSERC VP Grants and Scholarships, to express our dismay with the decisions in light of the statements in the 2012 budget briefing that “programming in support of basic research, student scholarships, and industry-related research initiatives and collaborations are preserved” and to better understand how NSERC arrived at such a course of action.

We understand that the decision to remove the RTI and MRS programs was the outcome of a budgetary process spanning all federal government departments and agencies and that there were specific reasons for the RTI and MRS programs being vulnerable to that process. It is evident that there is an expectation within government that the CFI grants can partially compensate for the loss of these programs and that researchers will use other NSERC programs, including Discovery Grant funding to further mitigate the loss of the RTI. The CAP Executive believes that these measures will be insufficient to prevent the damage to basic research in Canada that will be caused by these developments.

We are following this up with a formal communication to NSERC via the established CAP-NSERC Liaison Committee channels. To help us in formulating our messages, within the upcoming week the CAP Executive will be asking all full members to complete a survey on these matters as well as on the changes to the Discovery Grant evaluation system. I strongly encourage you to participate in this survey so that we have the broadest possible input from the community.

At this time, if you work in a university we urge you to contact and provide information to your VP Research about the specific damage the loss of these programs will mean to your research. Please copy the CAP office (cap@uottawa.ca) on such communications, as it will provide us with more detailed information about the impact of these cuts. We believe that the VPs Research from across Canada can have an effective impact on government policy and that they should be engaged to help solve the problems brought about by these changes. The CAP will be contacting them in an effort to encourage them to act collectively on this pressing matter and your letters will help us in that effort.

Regarding the National Research Council, the federal government's intention to refocus the NRC more toward the applied and commercialization end of R&D through a variety of initiatives was announced some time ago, although the details were not publicly available. Through communications with university-based researchers collaborating with NRC scientists and those using NRC facilities, we are aware that the implementation of changes has been underway for some months. A letter to the Prime Minister was sent from the CAP President that touched on these matters and expressed the need to preserve the expertise of the NRC Institutes. We are now considering ways to follow up on this. To assist in this initiative, if your research depends on NRC resources or an NRC Institute, the CAP Executive invites you to inform us of how your research might be affected by the changes underway at NRC by emailing the CAP office (cap@uottawa.ca).

I am also contacting other Canadian scientific associations to understand how these changes at NSERC and NRC have been affecting their constituents and to determine what coordinated action can be taken on these matters of common concern.

The CAP Executive may request your action in taking additional steps and I ask that you watch for emails from the CAP on these matters.

I urge you to attend the 2012 CAP Congress in Calgary, if you have not already decided to do so, and to participate in the several events during which these issues will be addressed. The CAP-NSERC Liaison Committee will be making a presentation during the 2012 CAP Congress, which is scheduled for Monday, June 11 from 13h45-14h30. This will be followed by a Report by NSERC on the 2012 Discovery Grant Competition Cycle. I will be speaking on the issues raised in this letter and other matters during the CAP Presidential address scheduled for Wednesday, June 13 starting at 16h20.

Sincerely,



Prof. J. Michael Roney, PPhys.
President, Canadian Association of Physicists