



January 4, 2021

President-elect Joe Biden  
1401 Constitution Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20230

Vice President-elect Kamala Harris  
1401 Constitution Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20230

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**IN MEMORIAM**

Jay A. Gershen, DDS, PhD

Dear President-elect Biden and Vice President-elect Harris,

On behalf of the Board of Directors and members of the Research!America [alliance](#), thank you for stepping into the roles of President and Vice President at this profoundly challenging and defining moment in our nation’s history. We are truly grateful for your respective records of service and for your commitment to not only navigate the COVID-19 pandemic but assure our nation emerges a far stronger and bolder adversary to the threats we face as a nation and global community.

The Research!America alliance advocates for science, discovery, and innovation to achieve better health for all. We are fully committed to working side by side with you to secure the medical, public health, and scientific progress fundamental to protecting and advancing the health of Americans and meeting other pivotal societal needs. In that context, we respectfully offer the following recommendations:

**Consistent with your *Build Back Better* platform, we urge you to boldly strengthen and mobilize our nation’s public and private sector science and technology enterprise to out-innovate societal threats, fuel jobs, and spur economic growth.**

Our nation and others across the globe have risen to meet COVID-19 in heroic and extraordinarily innovative ways, but the difficult truth is that as a nation and a global community, we were unprepared and overwhelmed by this virus. We have a new sense of the breadth and depth of devastation that can attend a crisis for which we are ill-prepared. COVID-19 is just one of a plethora of short and long-term threats to the safety, security, stability, health, and wellbeing of our nation and populations across the globe.

Our nation – working in a coordinated, methodical manner across sectors and in consultation with our global partners – can speed progress against debilitating and deadly health threats that come on suddenly or over time, destroying lives and undercutting fiscal stability. We can turn our vulnerabilities in the global

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economic arena into unparalleled strengths and defeat other existential threats, both at home and abroad.

But we cannot accomplish any of these goals without an urgent, intentional effort to ensure both public and private sector-funded science and technology (S&T) become a major strategic focus of the United States. Attempting to outrun threats when they are on our heels is avoidable and – as we have all too clearly witnessed – profoundly dangerous.

As delineated in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences report, [\*The Perils of Complacency: America at a Tipping Point in Science and Engineering\*](#), our near stagnant investment in S&T over the last decade stands in stark contrast to that of China and other competitor nations. We applaud your determination to grow funding substantially over the next four years. It is this kind of commitment that can lead to a new era in which the U.S. brings S&T to bear not just to respond to major societal threats, but to preempt and eviscerate them.

A group of nationally known leaders, including those who have served in Congress, key executive branch roles, academia, scientific societies, industry, philanthropy, communications, and advocacy, have developed a *Science and Technology Action Plan* that has been shared with your Transition Team. The plan outlines a strategy for heightening and coordinating S&T strengths in a manner that does not simply respond to the reality of existential threats but commits to out-innovating them.

Several other exceptionally robust and strategic proposals and sets of recommendations, including the Schumer/Young *Endless Frontier Act*, the Council of Competitiveness' [\*Competing in the Next Economy\*](#) report, and the National Academies' [\*The Endless Frontier: The Next 75 Years in Science\*](#) report, provide critical strategic thinking on the path to a new era of prolific, strategic and, we would argue, indispensable S&T productivity.

As the momentum for a fundamental change in priority, investment, and approach increases, your *Build Back Better* Plan speaks to this imperative in calling for far greater S&T investment in science and breakthrough technologies over the next four years. According to a recent national public opinion survey Research!America commissioned for the S&T Action Plan Committee, Americans concur: some 78% agree “the COVID-19 pandemic is a disruptive event that requires urgent refocusing of America's commitment to science.”<sup>1</sup> We urge you to work with the Action Plan Committee and the diversity of other concerned Americans who stand willing and prepared to assist and begin an S&T build-out immediately upon entering office.

### **Champion the Creation of a “Never Again” Commission.**

It would be difficult to overstate the breadth and depth of COVID-19's impact. As our nation and the global community continue to fight our way out of this crisis, the devastation we are witnessing and the knowledge we are so painfully gaining are fresh in our minds. If we do not act now to document and evaluate the lessons COVID-19 is imparting, time will inevitably dim our memories and divert our attention. We cannot turn this tragedy into a triumph; it will always

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<sup>1</sup>Research!America. [\*Broad Bipartisan Support for a Stronger Focus on Science\*](#). Research!America; 2020.

be a tragedy. But we can learn from it. Our nation should act now to identify best pandemic preparedness and response practices from within and outside the U.S.; face up to missteps; evaluate pandemic-prompted policy, regulatory, and practice changes to decide which to keep, which to modify and which to discard; and address any long-standing issues that COVID-19 underscored or exacerbated.

For example, COVID-19 has brought into the foreground the persistent issue of racial, ethnic, socio-economic, and geographic disparities in health and healthcare. What can we do to relegate those disparities to the past? Which of the regulatory changes made to empower the COVID-19 response should be carried forward for efficiency, or more importantly, because they produce more societal good than harm? Which should be abandoned? Which appropriations norms supported the COVID-19 response and which impeded it? The ability of federal agencies to respond was influenced by administrative action, statute, appropriations requirements and levels, domestic and international collaboration, and individual decision-making. A 9/11-like commission should be created to investigate the pandemic from all of these angles, now. We should not allow time or any other counterforce to squander the opportunity our nation has to become smarter through a clear-eyed, real-time, dispassionate review of this crisis.

### **Elevate the Priority of Ending Deadly and Debilitating Health Threats.**

The COVID-19 pandemic is clearly an urgent public health threat that must be stopped. For far too many Americans, COVID-19 is a health threat on top of other health threats they have been battling for years and, perhaps, all of their lives. As of January 4, 2021, nearly 17 million people in the United States are battling cancer,<sup>2</sup> more than five million are living with Alzheimer's,<sup>3</sup> and over 32 million are living with diabetes.<sup>4</sup> That is only a fraction of the number of people in our country living with chronic diseases. Compared to peer nations, the U.S. has among the highest number of hospitalizations from preventable causes and the highest rate of avoidable deaths.<sup>5</sup> Americans want our nation to fight back. According to a national public opinion survey Research!America commissioned just before the pandemic emerged in the U.S., 88% of Americans believe it is important for the President and Congress to assign a high priority to ensuring faster medical progress, and nearly 70% would pay \$1 more in taxes each week if they knew the dollars were being spent on medical research.<sup>6</sup>

With the pandemic, we as a society are – together and individually – witnessing a horrific number of premature deaths. Diseases bring about these deaths every second of every day. We simply must speed progress against them.

Please include a major increase in the annual budgets of the National Institutes of Health, the Food and Drug Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, and the National Science Foundation in your first proposed

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<sup>2</sup>American Cancer Society. *Cancer Treatment & Survivorship Facts & Figures 2019-2021*. Atlanta: American Cancer Society; 2019.

<sup>3</sup>Alzheimer's Association. *2020 Alzheimer's Disease Facts & Figures*. Chicago: Alzheimer's Association; 2020.

<sup>4</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). *National Diabetes Statistics Report, 2020*. Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services; 2020.

<sup>5</sup>Roosa Tikkanen and Melinda K. Abrams. *U.S. Health Care from a Global Perspective, 2019: Higher Spending, Worse Outcomes?*. Commonwealth Fund; 2020.

<sup>6</sup>Research!America. *Americans' Views on Funding for Science, Medical, and Health Research*. Research!America; 2020.

budget to Congress. As philanthropist Jed Manchurian recently noted: “There are too many patients to be patient.”

We know the job ahead of you is of the utmost importance and serious nature. Our nation can meet this moment: by acting boldly now, you and every member of Congress can accept nothing less for our country than security, prosperity, and progress. We look forward to working with you and your Administration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary Woolley". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and legible.

Mary Woolley  
President & CEO  
Research!America