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and earlier*

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February 1, 2007

Dr. Arden L. Bement Jr., Director
National Science Foundation
4201 Wilson Blvd.
Arlington, VA 22230

Re: **Headline: NSF to Test Ideological Assumptions**

Dear Dr. Bement:

During the public comment period for NSF's draft strategic plan (2006-2011), I submitted a recommendation for a rapid-learning project, in the spirit of the Michelson-Morley experiment, to make a rigorous and fairminded test of ideological assumptions in social and economic policy. I hope this initiative has been presented to the National Science Board for a vote and that the headline (above) will appear soon in Science and the New York Times.

Thoughtful Americans have always supported NSF's role to supply an independent voice of reason and evidence-based discussion. I think that you will have the support of a Democratic Congress.¹

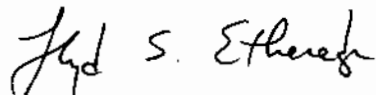
It is inspiring when serious people make a principled commitment. NSF's renewed and straightforward commitment to evidence-based policy will be a source of enduring pride among scientists and at our colleges and universities, just as the Supreme Court's 1954 decision to end racial segregation became a source of national pride and contributed to a healthier society.

I doubt that the potential headline (above) is dangerous to NSF or to the national science budget. A few remaining fire-breathing zealots, sensing a turf

war, may attack you. However (if they trust you) it is likely that many Republican think-tanks will be engaged by the project. Their deep concern has been that their ideas are ignored by social scientists.

It is unlikely that all of the truths of social and economic policy will lie at a single point along the one Left-Right dimension in recent American public debates. They may not lie along this dimension at all.

Yours sincerely,



(Dr.) Lloyd S. Etheredge, Director
Government Learning Project

cc: National Science Board

1. We learned many important lessons from evaluations of Democratic assumptions during the Great Society years, especially about the pre-eminent importance of a K-12 education system that works for all students - e.g., Daniel P. McMurer and Isabel V. Sawhill, Getting Ahead: Economic and Social Mobility in America (Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 1998). Good social science led to new initiatives with bipartisan support - e.g., the No Child Left Behind educational initiative of the Bush Administration and the earlier welfare reform of the Clinton Administration.