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June 10, 2010

Dr. Suzanne Fortier, President
National Science and Engineering Research Council
350 Albert Street
Ottawa, ON, Canada
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Dear Suzanne:

On May 29, 2010, the Canadian Council of University Chemistry Chairs gathered for their annual meeting at the Canadian Society for Chemistry conference in Toronto. As has long been the custom, a delegation from NSERC attended to offer results and information regarding the most recent Discovery Grant competition. This year, we were pleased to host Jennifer Bean and Madeleine Bastien.

Following their clear and thoughtful overview the CCUCC members engaged with Jennifer and Madeleine in a frank and constructive discussion. At the conclusion of that discussion, the department chairs voted unanimously to ask me to transmit the following resolution of our council:

The CCUCC recommends to NSERC that it allocate the \$8 million in new funding earmarked in the 2010 Federal Budget for *NSERC Discovery Research* entirely to the Discovery Grant program.

The Discovery Grant program is of vital importance to Canadian science. It represents NSERC's flagship funding program and has been recognized by the International Review Panel for its support of excellence in basic research across the full spectrum of academic institutions in Canada. The curiosity-driven research programs it uniquely funds have led to many breakthrough discoveries with potential for commercialization.

For example, Philip Jessop's research on switchable solvents, which won the NSERC Polanyi Award last year, would not have been possible with other NSERC programs or with American funds (DOE, NSF, NIH) because of the expectation in those funding systems that the project outcomes be predicted. The switchable solvents were not a

predictable result; they were a fortunate discovery that came out of unrelated research. That is indeed one of the key strengths of the Discovery Grant system; it has the flexibility to invest in research programs, not projects, so that researchers who recognize and jump on a promising new avenue of research are not penalized for straying from their original project.

The Discovery Grant system offers another unique strength to Canadian science in that it allows researchers across the full spectrum of academic institutions, from large research-intensive universities to small primarily undergraduate universities to carry out innovative research that contributes to the training of highly qualified personnel.

However, we are concerned that the redirection of new permanent funding from the Discovery Grant program will erode its foundation and compromise the long-term sustainability of Canadian scientific research.

The CCUCC is concerned that the new Discovery Grant adjudication system implemented last year may exacerbate this erosion. The new conference model, with its binning system for ranking grant proposals does have significant merit in allowing deserving researchers to receive grants commensurate with the quality of their proposals, regardless of their funding history. However, because the Discovery Grant program has not received incremental funding to match this new initiative, such recognition of excellence must come at the expense of other grants that necessarily go unfunded.

Many grants that went unfunded this year were of high quality, and would have been funded in the old adjudication system; in the 2010 Chemistry Discovery Grant competition, established researchers with ratings averaging to Strong were not funded. Furthermore, significant evidence has accumulated over the past two years showing that a disproportionately large number of smaller grants were terminated as a result of this zero-sum game, many of which were held by researchers at primarily undergraduate institutions.

This situation can only worsen when the nineteen new Canada Excellence Research Chairs enter the system and join in future Discovery Grant competitions.

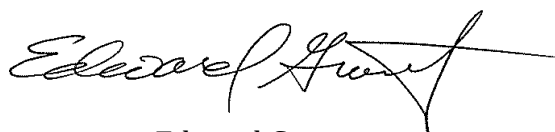
The Discovery Grant program is the only major program in the NSERC portfolio to have undergone a major revision of its adjudication system, yet no additional resources have been committed to facilitate what has been, by many accounts, a difficult transition and new pressures ahead. The Discovery Grant program is an integral part of the fabric of our research community, and we need to make sure that it remains healthy and equally accessible to the full spectrum of deserving Canadian researchers in large and small institutions.

Thus, we argue now is not the time to create new programs that will further stretch NSERC's limited resources. Instead, now is the time to strengthen the foundation of our flagship Discovery Grant program.

The signatories of this letter, which include 49 Canadian Chemistry department Chairs and Heads, urge NSERC in the strongest possible terms to fully allocate the \$8 million in new permanent funding to the Discovery Grant budget for the 2011 competition.

On behalf of the Canadian Council of University Chemistry Chairs,

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Edward Grant", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Edward Grant
Chair, CCUCC