

14 June 2016

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
304 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
503 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510



VOTING MEMBERS

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Bodega Marine Laboratory
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Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute
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Dear Chairman Shelby and Ranking Member Mikulski,

On behalf of the ocean science and technology community, Consortium for Ocean Leadership would like to thank you for your thoughtful development and cultivation of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations Act and accompanying committee report. Ocean science strengthens our national security, underpins our economy, supports a safe and efficient marine transportation system, and furthers our understanding of complex ocean and coastal ecosystems. Our consortium of the leading oceanographic research institutions in academia, aquaria, and industry appreciates your acknowledgement of federal science support across all disciplines and your commitment to allowing directorate-level funding decisions to be left to the peer review system, and the experts at the National Science Foundation (NSF) with considered input from the broader scientific community, including the National Science Board and the National Academies. The prioritization away from ocean and coastal research at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and significant reductions to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) Earth Science Division, however, are of great concern and short-sighted.

Ocean scientists have been grateful that the Committee has "long been supportive of NSF's peer review process to identify and recommend funding for scientifically meritorious research" and agree with the Committee's assertion that "NSF's ability to fund cutting-edge research helps keep the country at the forefront of research across all scientific disciplines, which in turn builds the technological capabilities that underpin economic growth and prosperity." Our nation's remarkably high return on investment for federally supported research is due to the fact that the best science within and across science disciplines – and its application to the nation's problems – rise to the top in our competitive, peer-review system. The political independence of academic researchers and their institutions has engendered trust from the public; this furthermore supports the business community as it transitions federally sponsored basic research into products and services that bolster the national economy. The merit review system remains the best means for meeting national scientific priorities, fostering innovation, and determining which grant proposals to fund. Regarding NSF funding, we are concerned about the scant 0.07% increase to the top line and flat funding for the Research and Related Activities. Given the current rate of inflation, these funding levels equate to cutting NSF's appropriations – at a time when other countries are making significant investments in basic science. We urge the committee to consider opportunities to maximize funding for this important agency so that we may maintain our nation's science primacy.


DISCOVERY • UNDERSTANDING • ACTION

Understanding our changing ocean depends upon research, surveying, modelling, observations, and technology development, which in turn depends upon adequate and sustained funding and a supported fleet recapitalization. The ocean science and technology community appreciates the Committee's support of NOAA's new vessel construction. Ocean observations and monitoring provide key information for extreme weather tracking, drought predictions, and storm forecasting – reducing costs of emergency management activities, increasing certainty for businesses, facilitating national and homeland security functions, and ultimately saving person and property. Additional to NOAA's mission to understand, protect, restore, and manage our ocean, coasts, and Great Lakes, data and information from NOAA's ocean programs support other federal agencies and their missions, to include Department of Defense and Homeland Security. It is a fallacious argument that is often presented to the American people – weather satellites or ocean and coastal research and management – the nation needs both. Balanced investment across both of NOAA's missions (atmospheric and oceanic) is critical in this time of a changing ocean. As we observe ongoing changes to our ocean that threaten ocean-based economies and coastal populations across the nation, now is the time to double down on science and research to better understand these climate and weather drivers, as well as potential impacts and possible mitigations.

Lastly, Congress' historical support for investments in NASA is appreciated by the earth and ocean science community. As a mission agency with a long-term research and development portfolio comprising more than 60% of its budget, NASA thrives on stable and robust investments.

Thank you for your continued leadership on science funding, and we welcome the opportunity to work with you further as Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations Act advances through the Senate.

Sincerely,



Jonathan W. White, RADM (Ret.), USN
President and CEO