November 5, 2009

The Honorable David Obey
The Honorable Jerry Lewis
The Honorable Alan B. Mollohan
The Honorable Frank Wolf

Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice
and Science
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Daniel Inouye
The Honorable Thad Cochran
The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
The Honorable Richard Shelby

Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice
and Science
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington DC 20510

Dear Chairpersons Inouye, Obey, Mollohan and Mikulski; and Ranking Members Cochran, Lewis, Shelby and Wolf:

On behalf of the members of the Consortium for Ocean Leadership, I am writing to express our gratitude for your support for oceanographic research and education programs in your FY10 bills and convey our priority funding recommendations for your consideration during conference negotiations.

With over 95,000 miles of coastline and the largest exclusive economic zone in the world, America is intricately connected to and reliant on the ocean. The ocean provides food, fresh water, minerals, energy, and vital transportation and national security benefits while supporting tens of millions of jobs. The ocean is also the lifeblood of the planet, playing a central role in the global water and climate systems by absorbing, storing and transferring massive amounts of heat, water and carbon. We are dependent on the ocean for the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat.

Despite its massive nature, the ocean and its ecosystems are fragile and are being threatened by unsustainable development, overfishing, pollution and climate change. Our ability to sustainably manage and conserve our vital ocean, coastal and Great Lake resources requires the ability to monitor, understand and forecast the physical, chemical and biological processes in the ocean. The draft Presidential National Ocean Policy sets an ambitious goal and framework for sustainably managing our ocean and coastal resources that will require significant scientific investments. Consequently, we respectfully recommend support for the following funding priorities.

National Science Foundation (NSF)
NSF is the largest federal source for ocean research and education programs. We encourage you to provide no less than the President’s budget request of $7.045 billion for NSF, including $5.73 billion for research activities. NSF supported research in the Arctic is particularly critical given the region’s pivotal role in the climate system and the international implications for navigation, commerce and national security in an ice-free Arctic. We believe that additional resources above the President’s request for arctic research at NSF would be a wise investment and essential for improving climate projections for the Arctic region that depend on knowing the state and circulation of the Arctic ocean, which is insufficiently instrumented for real-time observations.
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

NOAA is the primary federal agency with science and management responsibilities over our ocean, coasts and atmosphere, making it a central player in the climate debate. Consequently, for NOAA to be a lead agency for gathering, managing and disseminating climate data and services, the agency's budget needs to increase significantly to meet its growing mandates and requirements. We support the provisions in the House bill that provide funding for a research grant competition relating to understanding and forecasting climate that will be open to all researchers. Furthermore, the proposed funding for ocean acidification monitoring and research is woefully insufficient to effectively monitor acidification, and to understand or forecast its impacts on ocean and coastal ecosystems. Carbon dioxide and pH sensors should be placed on all of our ocean and coastal assets. In addition, carbon cycling and studies of ecosystem response to acidification need to be expanded. Consequently, we respectfully request an additional $23 million above the President's request for competitive climate change research to address these needs.

Implementation of the draft National Ocean Policy and framework for marine spatial planning also will require enhancing NOAA-led expertise in ecosystem-based science, which will necessitate increased investments in ocean observing, process studies, modeling and forecasting. The Integrated Ocean Observing System is a critical tool to support marine spatial planning efforts. However, the system needs to be funded at the $150 million level recommended by the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy if it is going to be capable of observing and forecasting the physics (temperature, currents, salinity), chemistry (pH, oxygen, dissolved carbon) and biology (chlorophyll, pathogens, fish populations). Funding at existing levels cannot build the system necessary to provide the science required for marine spatial plans.

We share your concerns with the cost overruns and delays in the geostationary and polar orbiting satellites. In addition, the VIIRS sensor on NPOESS will not provide sufficient quality ocean color data, which will lead to a substantial gap in ocean color measurements that are essential for determining the effect of climate change on ocean productivity. We greatly appreciate the inclusion of $20 million for the Jason-3 altimetry mission. We hope that our earth observing systems management can be restructured to avert the impending critical climate and weather data gaps.

Lastly, we strongly support the NOAA education programs that are essential for developing responsible ocean and coastal stewards, as well as cultivating future scientists. We respectfully request no less than $46 million for NOAA's office of education – which is equivalent to the FY09 funding level. We recommend the development of a summer internship program to provide high school students with opportunities to work in exciting research settings at universities, marine laboratories or at sea. This program should complement a robust set of fellowships, traineeships and internships for graduate study in the marine and climate sciences.

National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)

We appreciate your acknowledged support for the Earth Science Decadal Survey Missions and the development of Tier 1 missions and the acceleration of Tier 2 and Tier 3 missions, particularly those to acquire ocean color, sea-surface wind and sea-surface temperature data. This information is essential for understanding the biology, chemistry and physics of the ocean and its role in the climate system. In addition, we support efforts to replace the capabilities of the lost Orbiting Carbon Observatory mission, which will provide essential data on the sources and sinks for carbon dioxide over the Earth's oceans. We therefore support the House mark for Earth Science of $1.44 billion, but note that the decadal survey projected an Earth Science budget of $2 billion and therefore urge a return to that investment level as soon as possible.

We greatly appreciate your past support for ocean research and education programs and hope that the final FY10 bill will improve our ability to understand, manage and conserve our ocean and coastal resources. Thank you for consideration of our requests.

Sincerely,

Robert B. Gagosian, Ph.D
President and CEO
Consortium for Ocean Leadership