May 22, 2013

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski  
Chairwoman  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Room S 128, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Room S 128, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20150

The Honorable Frank Wolf  
Chairman  
Commerce, Justice, Science Subcommittee  
House Appropriations Committee  
H-309, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chaka Fattah  
Ranking Member  
Commerce, Justice, Science Subcommittee  
House Appropriations Committee  
H-309, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairpersons Mikulski and Wolf and Ranking Members Shelby and Fattah:

On behalf of the 97 member institutions of the Consortium for Ocean Leadership and the 104 university members and affiliates of the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research (UCAR), we are writing to share our FY 2014 funding priorities for the science agencies under your purview. Given the austere budget environment and statutory budget restrictions placed on your committees, we hope you will continue to value and prioritize science investments as they fundamentally drive innovation and thus our nation’s economic future.

The National Science Foundation (NSF) is our top funding priority as it is the premier federal agency tasked with supporting basic research, which underpins all future scientific advances. Currently, there are tremendous pressures upon the NSF science directorates as several new initiatives — so-called “One NSF initiatives” — were originated in a much different fiscal environment and their continued growth is of primary concern. We strongly believe the current fiscal situation requires carefully and deliberately setting priorities in science. However, the long-term health of science requires that such priorities not be set in a way that leads to significant and potentially detrimental tradeoffs within or between one field of science and another — or between core disciplines and cross Foundation initiatives. We believe that given the actual resources likely to be available to NSF in this budget environment, the disproportionate degree of growth NSF is proposing for the “One NSF initiatives” is coming at the expense of the health of core and related cross-disciplinary research and national research infrastructure activities. We hope that the Committee will agree to rebalance the NSF portfolio when it develops its recommendations for FY 2014.
The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) needs timely, accurate scientific observations and predictions to meet its many missions and mandates. Given the tight budget allocations, we believe that NOAA needs to significantly rely more upon the extramural academic research community, where the bulk of the nation’s scientific expertise exists. The competitive peer-review grant process ensures that the best ideas are funded while also being flexible and efficient. To succeed, NOAA needs to engage in this paradigm shift as significant growth in NOAA’s satellite budget and fiscal concerns in the National Weather Service means that NOAA’s other line offices will likely be expected to meet their missions with less money. Ultimately, we hope you will be observant to ensure that NOAA’s increased investments in satellites and salaries do not undercut the resources necessary to investigate, understand and utilize the observational data.

We continue to be very concerned about the nation’s Earth observing satellite programs and maintaining continuity of long-term data sets, which are essential for protecting lives and property while helping prepare our nation for the challenges of a rapidly changing environment. We support full funding for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration’s (NASA) Earth Science Division research and missions and hope these resources will be sufficient for NASA to meet their new climate observation requirements that are being assumed from NOAA. We hope you will continue your close oversight of our federal earth observing programs to help ensure that our satellite missions can be cost-efficient, reliable and effective.

Finally, we are extremely concerned about the Administration’s proposed reshuffling of the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education programs in the mission agencies. We fear that the proposed streamlining will result in the loss of many valuable programs that have successfully helped to meet the workforce needs of the mission agencies. Removing these programs from mission agencies and placing them in non-mission agencies will result in the demise of several of the programs, because they will end up in agencies that may have little to no experience in the STEM education field.

We know that sea levels are rising, warmer ocean waters will likely create more significant storms, and there will be future tsunamis, tornadoes and oil spills; we just don’t know when, where or their magnitude. However, the academic research community is well-trained, prepared and located throughout the nation to help America meet these challenges. We greatly appreciate your consideration of our recommendations and would be happy to discuss these with you further at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Robert B. Gagosian  
President, Ocean Leadership

Thomas J. Bogdan  
President, UCAR