Dear Chairman Mikulski and Ranking Member Shelby:

On behalf of the members of the Consortium for Ocean Leadership, I am writing to share our recommendations for the FY2011 Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. Ocean Leadership represents 95 of the nation’s leading public and private ocean research and education institutions, aquaria and industry. We greatly appreciate your previous support for ocean science and education funding and hope that you will continue to make these investments so our nation can be prepared to address the challenges facing our ocean and coasts.

The importance of the ocean to our nation’s economy, transportation, trade and national security has been highlighted by the President’s National Ocean Policy Task Force (OPTF). The OPTF Interim Report to the President on A National Ocean Policy acknowledges the need for science to inform and improve ocean policy decisions and expand our capacity to respond to change and challenges. We respectfully recommend the following allocations for our nation’s ocean agencies.

National Science Foundation (NSF)

NSF is the largest federal source for ocean research and education programs and we encourage you to provide no less than the President’s budget request of $7.424 billion, including $6.019 billion for research activities. In particular, we support the request for the Geosciences Directorate (GEO) and the Division of Ocean Sciences (OCE), which fund critical research to understand changing ocean circulation, temperature, chemistry as well as past ocean and climate conditions.

The proposed emphasis on climate change is essential for improving our ability to understand and forecast the role that the ocean plays in our climate system as well as the changing climate’s impact on ocean ecosystems. We believe building the Ocean Observatories Initiative, advancing ocean acidification research, integrating marine ecosystem and climate change models, supporting oceans and human health centers, and studying interactions between warming oceans and ice-sheets are critical.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

NOAA is a critical resource management agency that requires world-class science to meet its mission that stretches from the bottom of the ocean floor to beyond our atmosphere. NOAA’s responsibilities continue to expand with the draft national ocean policy, and without an influx of significant new resources NOAA will be unable to accomplish many of its current and new mandates. NOAA’s budget will need to approach $8 billion soon if it is going to be capable of gathering, managing and disseminating climate data, products and services for the nation while meeting its existing mandates.

NOAA will play a pivotal role in implementing a national ocean policy and in particular supporting coastal and marine spatial planning efforts. The nation’s ability to monitor and forecast ocean and coastal conditions rests upon NOAA’s observational assets, applied research and modeling capabilities. Therefore, we respectfully request additional resources be provided so that NOAA can invest $27 million for coastal and marine spatial planning activities; devote $50 million for...
regional ocean partnership grants; and provide $60 million for the integrated ocean observing system. These investments will facilitate sustainable management decisions by helping state and regional ocean planning efforts to ascertain, monitor, forecast and validate ocean and coastal conditions.

While NOAA’s budget has expanded recently to address its growing satellite needs, many of the extramural research programs have suffered. Considering that NOAA’s mission requires world-class science, we hope that Congress can reinvest in these efforts that provide NOAA with critical information, understanding and expertise in a flexible and cost-efficient manner. For instance, the National Sea Grant College Program has been funded at the same level for more than a decade. This has impeded its ability to engage with universities, researchers and students in supporting citizens in making science-based decisions that lead to vibrant, economically healthy and safe coastal communities that utilize resources sustainably and function within healthy ecosystems. Given that science-based decisions are at the heart of the draft national ocean policy and regional coordination is an integral part of coastal and marine spatial planning initiatives, we request that the program be funded at its congressionally authorized level of $79 million.

NOAA’s investment in oceans and human health has suffered a much worse fate, shifting from a robust level of $18 million in FY05 down to a requested level of $1 million. Incidents of waterborne diseases are on the rise as more Americans are living in coastal communities whose development has led to increased outbreaks of red-tides, harmful algal blooms and exposure to other marine pathogens. Thus, we should be investing more, not less in oceans and human health research to help protect public health. Likewise, NOAA’s investments in ocean exploration and undersea research have dwindled from over $40 million in FY05 to $30 million this year. Ninety-five percent of the ocean still yet to be explored and the ocean’s role in driving the climate system needs better understanding. This funding level is a minuscule investment that needs to grow rather than shrink. Consequently, we respectfully request a return to the FY05 funding levels for the oceans and human health initiative, ocean exploration and the national undersea research programs.

In order to leverage university-based education, research and technologies to improve fisheries management, we request $10 million for a new extramural research and education program within the National Marines Fisheries Service. This new program will help NOAA as it shifts from single species to ecosystem-based fishery management, particularly in terms of understanding how marine ecosystems function and respond to climate change.

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 request $54 million for NOAA’s Office of Education – which is merely one percent of the total budget request for NOAA and equivalent to the FY10 enacted level.

**National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)**

NASA provides critical support for Earth science and oceanographic remote sensing, which have greatly advanced our ability to forecast weather, make climate projections and better understand Earth ecosystems on a global scale. We are encouraged by the FY11 budget request and its commitment to return to NASA’s historical investment in Earth science of $2 billion by 2012.

Even with these proposed increased investments, we are concerned about the loss of time-series ocean observations that are essential for monitoring and building environmental models and forecasts. In particular, we encourage you to provide additional funds to address our most pressing needs in the acquisition of ocean color and sea-surface wind data. This information is essential for understanding the biology, chemistry and physics of the ocean including improving climate models, predicting hurricanes, and detecting changes in ocean life.

We greatly appreciate your past support for ocean research and education programs and hope that you can produce a bill that improves our ability to understand, manage and conserve our ocean and coastal resources. Thank you considering our requests.

Sincerely,

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