Testimony of Robert B. Gagosian  
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House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice and Science  
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On behalf of the 99 member institutions of the Consortium for Ocean Leadership, we respectfully recommend the Committee support the President’s FY12 budget request of $7.7 billion for the National Science Foundation (NSF); $1.8 billion for NASA Earth Science; and that you fully fund the extramural research and observation programs at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

If we learned anything from the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill last spring, it was that our nation was ill prepared to deal with a major environmental disaster along our coastline. Because we do not have a robust ocean observing system in the Gulf of Mexico, we were not able to detect, monitor and forecast the location of the subsurface oil plume. The lack of this basic information led to uninformed resource management decisions, dueling scientific predictions, and general confusion and disillusionment among the public.

Given that the majority of Americans live along our coasts, the ocean is a major driver for commerce, transportation, tourism, recreation, national defense and the economy. Our lack of scientific understanding and observational capabilities in these areas makes our nation unnecessarily vulnerable to future perturbations from the ocean, whether they are oil spills, hurricanes, toxic algal blooms or tsunamis. The extramural science and observational programs funded by NSF, NOAA and NASA are essential for helping our nation better prepare for and mitigate the impacts of future disasters. The BP oil spill is having a multi-billion dollar economic impact in the Gulf just five years after hurricanes Katrina and Rita caused more than $60 billion in insured losses. In contrast, the scientific investment we support is minimal, but essential.

While we understand the current fiscal realities facing our nation, we believe that cutting Federal support for science now will do little to reduce the deficit. What it will do is to harm our current economy and do great damage to our nation’s ability to compete in the global marketplace that is driven by innovation. Disinvesting in science will lead our country off of the sound financial path along which research has led us over the past 50 years, and will do lasting harm to our economy and security of our nation.

The Federal investment in research and development is but a fraction of the Federal budget, yet it has been critical in helping our nation lead the world economy. The Congressional Budget Office has estimated a 28% return on investment for federal research spending, and other economists have estimated that science and technology have accounted for well over half our economic growth in the last century.

It seems that everything is “made in China” and with China opening major research universities and investing billions of new dollars in science (increasing funding for its equivalent of NSF by 20% per year) it is clear their goal is for everything to also be “invented in China”. How the United States responds to that challenge is in your hands. We recognize the extremely difficult decisions that face this committee, but I can assure you that compromising our nation’s investment in science would be a grave mistake at this critical juncture.