April 9, 2014

The Honorable Richard Durban
The Honorable Thad Cochran
The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen
The Honorable Peter Visclosky

United States Congress
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairmen Durban and Frelinghuysen and Ranking Members Cochran and Visclosky,

On behalf of the 90 member institutions of the Consortium for Ocean Leadership, I am writing to share our funding priorities for the FY15 Defense Appropriations Act. Given the austere budget, we fear that a downward trajectory in the defense sciences will threaten the Navy’s ability to have a clear understanding what is occurring above, below and on the surface of the ocean. Consequently, we recommend no less than $620 million for Navy 6.1 basic research and $860 million for 6.2 applied research in FY15.

The 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review highlights the need to “sustain priority investments in science, technology, research, and development both within the defense sector and beyond.” Naval oceanographic research produces solutions to difficult and complex operational challenges in the littoral and blue water environments. The fleet requires this knowledge to successfully address increasingly technologically advanced submerged threats. These investments facilitate access to a technically sophisticated extramural science community where the bulk of intellectual capacity exists. Furthermore, through the Office of Naval Research (ONR) support, the next generation of experts is developed, trained and prepared to tackle the unknown threats of tomorrow. This longstanding relationship, going back 65 years, has served the Navy, the DOD and the nation well, through bold discoveries that helped end the Cold War. ONR has supported more than fifty Nobel laureates, and breakthrough discoveries in areas such as lasers, precision timekeeping, and molecular biology that not only ensured our military supremacy at sea, but helped advance our nation’s innovation economy.

The President’s FY15 budget request includes a number of cuts to Navy basic research, including $10 million to ocean sciences that will negatively impact seagoing research groups and a resulting loss of engineering and technical staff. These cuts are particularly troubling given emerging strategic threats and the need for a proportionate military presence to enhance stability and maritime security in the Pacific and Arctic, including antisubmarine warfare (ASW) shortfalls associated with China’s expanding naval presence. Our Navy’s competitive advantage in ASW research and other ocean sciences relies on the ability to execute unique data collection systems and sea-going expertise. The backbone for these programs comprises scientists, expert engineers and technicians with decades of experience in executing research at sea. The Chinese are making large investments in acoustics and are making great strides in theoretical work that could threaten our technical competitive advantage at sea.
In February, the U.S. Navy released an updated Arctic Roadmap to prepare naval forces over the next 15 years for operations in the Arctic Ocean. To plan for the changing Arctic environment, the Arctic Road Map implementation plan emphasizes: increased investment in research and development to better understand long-term climate processes and improve near-term weather predictions; a national effort towards ocean bottom mapping in support of accurate nautical charts; development of requirements for standard aids to navigation in Arctic waters; evaluation of future shore infrastructure requirements; and evaluation of requirements for logistics support capabilities for Arctic operations. We hope that you will continue to support the scientific resources necessary to ensure that our nation has these capabilities.

Recently, CNR Matthew Klunder stated that “Unmanned systems and autonomy are force multipliers. Innovative, forward-leaning C4ISR [command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance] systems will be required for future autonomous networked sensors above, on and below the seas. When we combine this with our emphasis on electromagnetic maneuver warfare, we believe we are positioning our Sailors and Marines to best address future threats.” However, a recent Broad Agency Announcement (BAA) for autonomy research went through the pre-approval process, ONR solicited full proposals, announced award winners, but then atypically failed to fund these awards due to budget constraints. This is just one example among many where cuts to research budgets are threatening future capabilities. ONR has been a very stable, reliable, and credible partner with the academic community, and we hope that the budget environment doesn’t threaten this historically strong and important relationship.

Finally, we have an aging oceanographic research fleet that requires investments to extend its service life. We greatly appreciate your support of $15 million in FY13 to help initiate the retrofit of the three Navy-owned AGOR class vessels, which have successfully conducted a broad range of ambitious research programs over the past 20 years. Unfortunately, the second phase of funding was not included in the FY14 omnibus appropriations bill, so we respectfully request $30 million in FY15 to complete the work for all three vessels. These are the only global class research vessels in America’s oceanographic fleet and without an extended service life; we will lose access to many parts of the ocean, including high-latitude regions, where change is happening rapidly in both the physical and the geopolitical environment.

We are very grateful for the support that you have previously demonstrated for oceanographic research and hope that you will continue to prioritize science investments to ensure we can maintain our nation’s superiority at sea. We greatly appreciate your consideration of our recommendations and would be happy to discuss these recommendations with you further at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Robert B. Gagosian
President, Ocean Leadership

cc: The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
    The Honorable Richard Shelby
    The Honorable Harold Rogers
    The Honorable Nita Lowey