February 10, 2009

The Honorable Harry Reid
The Honorable Daniel Inouye
The Honorable Thad Cochran
The Honorable Max Baucus
The Honorable Charles Grassley
United States Senate
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable David Obey
The Honorable Jerry Lewis
The Honorable Charles Rangel
The Honorable Dave Camp
The Honorable Henry Waxman
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

Dear Conferrees:

On behalf of the 93 members of the Consortium for Ocean Leadership, I am writing to express our strong support for ocean science funding in H.R.1, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. We appreciate your proposed investments in ocean research and science infrastructure as vital components to stimulate the economy while also providing essential information for decision makers to better manage our coastal resources at a critical time of rapid environmental change.

Now more than ever we need the tools to help us understand the ocean’s role in our changing climate, and as a source of renewable energy, food and national security. The uncertainties surrounding rates of sea-level rise and coastal inundation are significant, which have tremendous implications for where and how we develop our coastlines. Making sound infrastructure investments in these areas requires quality science-based information.

We strongly support the funding provided to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Science Foundation (NSF), National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and the Departments of Energy and Interior in H.R.1. As you conference these bills we offer the following recommendations:

- NSF - We support $2.5 billion for Research and Related Activities to fund additional awards in all research disciplines and renovation and maintenance of the academic research fleet. We agree that our nation’s competitiveness in the global marketplace requires a renewed federal commitment to research and innovation. We support restoring the funding rate for highly-rated NSF grants to 32%. However, it is important to recognize that the infusion of young scientists into the research pipeline must be sustained in future budgets to maintain the intellectual capacity necessary to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

We strongly support $400 million in the MREFC account for major research facilities and equipment that have been previously approved or are nearing their completed design review. Projects such as the Ocean Observatories Initiative and the Alaska Regional Research Vessel will create jobs quickly while also providing unique real-time access to critical areas of the ocean that are essential for understanding and forecasting climate change.

DISCOVERY • UNDERSTANDING • ACTION
Given the current economic climate, we believe that exemptions to cost-sharing requirements for the Major Research Instrumentation (MRI) program are appropriate and necessary.

- **NOAA**: We support the $600 million for satellite acquisition and development, especially for the acquisition of climate sensors, climate modeling, and climate data records. These investments are critical if we are to continue to lead the world in earth observation technology and climate modeling.

  We also support the proposed $795 million for construction and repair of NOAA facilities and urge you to direct a substantial proportion of those funds to the integrated ocean observing system (IOOS). The United States has maintained a system for observing the weather for more than 230 years, but is just beginning to extend that system to the 70 percent of the Earth’s surface covered by the oceans. Considering that the vast majority of the planet’s heat is absorbed, stored, and transported globally by the sea, the oceans are the missing link in the climate system. Timely information about the oceans would improve weather and climate forecasts, enhance the safety and efficiency of maritime operations, strengthen homeland security, support ocean and coastal resource management and assist in controlling marine pollution.

  We support funding for habitat restoration, hydrographic survey backlog, marine debris and mitigation projects. We encourage the conferees to make these funds available through competitive peer-reviewed grants.

- **NASA**: We support $400 million for earth science and climate missions. These missions are vital for gathering information about ocean temperature changes, sea ice loss, and greenhouse gas concentrations. Earth observations from space are needed now more than ever as society begins to cope with global warming, sea level rise, droughts, ocean acidification and its impacts on fisheries and coastal ecosystems.

- **Department of Energy** – We support funding for renewable energy research and development projects to improve our ability to harness ocean energy. These projects may include wave energy, tidal energy, ocean current energy, salinity gradient energy, and ocean thermal gradient energy as well as offshore wind as authorized in the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007.

- **Department of Interior** – We support $200 million for repair and restoration of science facilities and equipment at the United States Geological Survey, which is essential for helping our nation respond to and manage our natural resources in a rapidly changing climate and environment.

With more than half of the U.S. population living in coastal communities generating more than half of our GDP, the ocean and coasts are major economic drivers that can stimulate our economy. Our oceans and coasts offer vast potential benefits and numerous and complex challenges. With your continued leadership, the United States now has a unique opportunity to create and preserve an essential cadre of skilled jobs while building the science infrastructure necessary to provide information for prudent decisions. As you begin to conference The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, we strongly encourage you to invest the resources required for NOAA, NASA, NSF, and the Departments of Energy and Interior to provide greater understanding of our ocean, stimulate job growth, and cultivate the next generation of innovators.

Sincerely,

Robert Gagosian
President and CEO