November 1, 2013

Dear Senator/Representative:

As national organizations supporting over 100 of the nation’s leading academic, nonprofit and business ocean and atmospheric research organizations, the Consortium for Ocean Leadership and the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research would like to express our deep concern about the impact of the continuing budget deadlock on science and research. We urge the Committee to find compromise that will replace the sequester, and restore funding for research programs and science agencies critical to the economy. In addition, we ask that any agreement exclude riders that are damaging to science, research, and the sustainable management of our natural resources.

The U.S. has led the world in research and technology since World War II, in part because our nation adopted an academic, university- and laboratory-based research enterprise partnering with the federal government rather than a European-style centralized system run directly by the government. Our remarkably high return on investment for federally supported research is due to the fact that the best science and its application to the nation’s problems rise to the top in our system, which continuously challenges the best minds through open competition and peer-review protocols. Furthermore, the political independence of academic researchers and their institutions has engendered trust from the public.

Despite the important role our research plays both to the country and the world, agencies that support federal science and research activities – and provide critical services – have seen their already very small portion of the budget decline for years. Total federal research and development funding fell from 1.3 percent of GDP to 0.8 percent between 1976 and 2012. Total federal research and development funding dropped from almost 12 percent of the total federal budget to under 4 percent between 1966 and 2013. Non-defense discretionary research and development spending is less than 2 percent of the total federal budget in FY 2013.

Absent Congressional action, funding for non-defense discretionary programs in FY 2014 will be 19 percent below 2010 levels (adjusted for inflation) due to cuts made in FY 2011 and under the Budget
Control Act of 2011, including sequestration. To date, non-defense discretionary spending, including science, research, and natural resource programs, has been disproportionately cut. These cuts have had tangible impacts on the economy and on the ability of U.S. scientists to maintain the high quality science the public expects, the government depends on, and upon which the economy is built. As you are well aware, the next round of sequestration will be felt most by the defense community, which has already had to adjust to significant budget cuts. We fear these cuts could threaten the technological, tactical, and intelligence-based supremacy that defense research funding has enabled, effectively threatening our national security. Shifting that burden to the non-defense community is not the answer, however. Congress should find savings that allow adequate and sustained federal support of research science in both the defense and non-defense sector.

The sequester, coupled with other recent cuts, has reduced scientific research; inhibited transfer of new data and information into usable products; postponed acquisition of critical equipment; compromised long-term monitoring data sets; gutted ocean and climate literacy, outreach and education; threatens our ability to sustain our current pool of scientists; holds back the next generation; makes policy decisions founded in sound science more difficult; and calls into question the nation’s scientific preeminence. Members from both sides of the aisle have stated that the sequester was not intended to become policy, yet impacts from the sequester and other cuts are compromising American science supremacy, which is harming the economy. Additionally, there are clear indications that these budget cuts are impacting young scientists, driving them to look to other countries to launch their careers. These individuals are the foundation of our future research and development enterprise.

We recognize the magnitude of the challenge ahead of you, but emphasize the importance of the need for cooperation and a return to regular budgetary order and sustained federal funding for research and development across the scientific disciplines. The federal budget cannot be balanced on the back of discretionary programs, we encourage you to find a compromise to replace the sequester with savings and revenue from other sources so our nation can continue to be the world leader in innovation.

Thank you for considering our views.

Regards,

Robert Gagosian

Thomas J. Bogdan

CC: The Honorable Barbara Mikulski, Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Hal Rogers, Chair, House Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Richard C. Shelby, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Nita M. Lowey
The Honorable Ron Wyden
The Honorable Diane Black
The Honorable James Clyburn
The Honorable Tom Cole
The Honorable Tom Price
The Honorable Kelly Ayotte
The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
The Honorable Chris Coons
The Honorable Michael Crapo
The Honorable Michael Enzi
The Honorable Lindsey Graham
The Honorable Chuck Grassley
The Honorable Ron Johnson
The Honorable Tim Kaine
The Honorable Angus King
The Honorable Jeff Merkley
The Honorable Bill Nelson
The Honorable Rob Portman
The Honorable Bernie Sanders
The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
The Honorable Pat Toomey
The Honorable Mark Warner
The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse
The Honorable Roger Wicker