June 4, 2012

The Honorable Daniel Inouye
The Honorable Thad Cochran
The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
The Honorable Kay Bailey Hutchison

Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice and Science
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington DC 20510

Dear Chairpersons Inouye and Mikulski and Ranking Members Cochran and Hutchison:

On behalf of the members of the Consortium for Ocean Leadership, I am writing to express our gratitude for your support for oceanographic research and education programs in the FY13 Commerce-Justice-Science spending bill (S.2465) and convey our support for the proposal to transfer the design and procurement of Earth observing satellites from NOAA to NASA.

Ocean Leadership represents more than 100 of the nation’s leading ocean research and education institutions. Over the past decade, we have been disheartened to witness the decay in our Earth observing capabilities as well as the detrimental impact that the cost overruns at NOAA have had on essential ocean research and education programs. Consequently, we are grateful for the leadership you have taken to consolidate Earth observing satellite design and procurement responsibilities within NASA for several reasons.

First, we believe that it will be more efficient to have one agency responsible for managing a design and procurement budget that is tightly aligned with realistic requirements. While it is important that NOAA be able to articulate what observations are needed to support critical operations, NASA should be given the authority to determine a suite of instrument and platform options that are technically feasible, financially achievable, and responsive to both NOAA’s and NASA’s objectives. The final platform/sensor requirements can then be developed and managed by NASA through a closely managed design and procurement process. This process should also be structured as to maintain and enhance NASA’s capacity to develop new technology and sensors as well as investigate other opportunities to access data through international partnerships and commercial entities. We also believe that NASA should be responsible for producing and distributing the primary data sets for their customers including the reprocessing of long-term satellite data records for science and operational needs.
Secondly, this proposal allows NOAA to focus its efforts on the operational use of the data, which provides vital information for weather forecasters, our military, research scientists and resource managers. We greatly appreciate the wise reinvestment of the savings realized through the transfer back into the ocean research and conservation programs, which have been cut in recent years. These programs are essential for improving understanding and providing the information necessary to sustainably manage America’s 95,000 miles of coastline and our offshore waters, the largest exclusive economic zone in the world.

We greatly appreciate your support for basic research, and in particular, the core science and infrastructure programs at the National Science Foundation. We are also grateful for the investment you are making in NASA Earth science, particularly given the recent National Academies report documenting the decline in civilian Earth-observing satellites.

Thank you for your past support for ocean research and education programs. We hope that you will continue to demonstrate the bold leadership necessary to ensure that the final FY13 bill will improve our ability to understand, manage and conserve our ocean and coastal resources. We appreciate your consideration of our recommendations.

Sincerely,

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