Dear Director Mulvaney:

As you prepare the administration’s fiscal year (FY) 2020 budget request, on behalf of the Consortium for Ocean Leadership (COL), which represents our nation’s leading ocean science, research, and technology organizations from academia, industry, and aquaria, I respectfully request you make funding for our nation’s ocean science agencies a priority. The Navy, the National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) all have important roles to play in the advancement of ocean science that relates directly to our security and prosperity as a nation. Your support is essential to ensure our nation is prepared and responsive to the numerous ocean-related threats and opportunities we face today and tomorrow: to quote Science and Technology for America’s Oceans: A Decadal Vision, “understanding the physical, chemical, biological, and geological changes in the ocean is vital to the survival and prosperity of humanity.”

Ocean science and technology strengthen our national and homeland security; underpin our economy; ensure food, water, and energy security; and provide for safety and efficiency in marine transportation. To maintain these securities upon which we all rely, ocean science and technology must be adequately and consistently funded. The benefits of investment in ocean science are clear, as are the catastrophes that occur without it. As the late Admiral James D. Watkins, chief of naval operations from 1982-1986, used to state, “Oceanography won the Cold War.” Our knowledge of the undersea domain gave the United States a competitive advantage over our enemies, an advantage that is in jeopardy today. Thanks to a better understanding of the ocean, we can now predict the intensity and path of hurricanes better than ever, which has saved countless lives and protected livelihoods. Projections show the ocean economy doubling its contribution to global value from 2010 to 2030, outpacing the global economy in the process; however, the blue economy can only grow if the ocean is healthy. For example, harmful algal blooms (HABs) can kill fish, destroy shellfish farms, and cause respiratory problems for those in its vicinity, negatively impacting the economy – a 2006 study found the average annual impact in U.S. waters to be $82 million. It’s clear that without ocean science and technology, and without associated federal investments to sustain and grow them, our nation is less secure and more susceptible to threats, be they from an intensifying hurricane or a crashing economy. The idea that our nation’s securities — national, homeland, economic, energy, food, and water — are dependent on a secure, prosperous, well-understood ocean is a concept I refer to as “ocean security; underpin our economy; ensure food, water, and energy security; and provide for safety and efficiency in marine transportation. To maintain these securities upon which we all rely, ocean science and technology must be adequately and consistently funded. The benefits of investment in ocean science are clear, as are the catastrophes that occur without it. As the late Admiral James D. Watkins, chief of naval operations from 1982-1986, used to state, “Oceanography won the Cold War.” Our knowledge of the undersea domain gave the United States a competitive advantage over our enemies, an advantage that is in jeopardy today. 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security.” Investments in ocean science and technology are critical to our ocean security, and I strongly encourage you to prioritize and fund the Navy, NSF, NOAA, and NASA. This will allow:

- The Navy to continue protecting operational forces, installations, and equipment; to further assess the state of ocean science and ensure our nation’s competitive advantage; to expand use of new technologies such as unmanned maritime systems;
- NSF to continue to advance understanding of the ocean and its interactions with people and Earth systems (such as hurricanes, floods, sea level rise, coastal erosion, and earthquakes); to support research at U.S. colleges and universities; to fund traineehips and research assistantships and invest in K-12 science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education; and to teach scientists to be business savvy;
- NOAA to continue improving weather and ocean forecasts and warnings; to rebuild fish stocks with world-class management; to create an ocean-literate society through formal and informal education; to improve safe and efficient maritime commerce; to address marine debris and harmful algal bloom crises; and
- NASA to continue to provide crucial information on ocean and atmospheric conditions; to keep tabs on hurricanes and other dynamic ocean phenomena; to inspire others to ask questions and pursue STEM careers.

I am especially concerned about the return of discretionary spending caps, imposed by the Budget Control Act of 2011, that stand to threaten federal investments in ocean science made possible in FY 2018, and those enacted or under consideration for FY 2019, by the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018. Similarly, I am also concerned that efforts will be made to further reduce NOAA’s budget to fund the 2020 Census within the Department of Commerce top line, and I strongly urge against that, as this is a tremendously important time to invest in the agency’s mission needs across its entire portfolio.

Innovation: An American Imperative, a 2015 call to action signed by more than 500 industry, higher education, science, and engineering leaders, asks Congress to “renew the federal commitment to scientific discovery” by providing “steady and sustained real growth in funding of at least four percent for basic scientific research” at several agencies, including NSF, NOAA, NASA, and the Department of Defense. I echo this request for increased investment and urge your support for a budget agreement that makes this possible by raising the spending caps.

In closing, I again ask you to prioritize funding for our ocean science agencies — Navy, NSF, NOAA, and NASA — in the administration’s FY 2020 budget request. By doing so, you will be supporting the coastal and ocean economy that contribute $359 billion to our GDP; advancing research into the major driver of weather and water cycles; protecting the increasing number of people calling the coast home (populations in coastal watershed counties increased 45 percent from 1970 to 2010); and creating STEM jobs for our innovation workforce. COL, and the member institutions we represent, would be pleased to serve as a resource should you have any questions or need any additional information.

Respectfully,

Jonathan W. White, RADM (Ret.), USN
President and CEO
Consortium for Ocean Leadership

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