

July 10, 2006

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman, Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Capitol Building, S-128
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Robert Byrd
Ranking Member, Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Capitol Building, S-128
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman, Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Capitol Building, S-146A
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Ranking Member, Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Capitol Building, S146A
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators:

As co-chairs of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative, representing the members of the congressionally-established U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the privately-funded Pew Oceans Commission, we are writing to request the Committee's continued support for ocean, coastal and Great Lake science, management, and education programs in the Commerce-Justice-Science FY 2007 appropriations bill.

As you are aware, the House recently passed its Science, State, Justice and Commerce spending bill (HR 5672), in which it once again imposed a severe funding cut—exceeding \$500 million from the FY 2006 enacted level—for ocean-related programs within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). We recognize the difficult budget environment facing the nation and the hard funding decisions the House Appropriations Committee members faced in developing HR 5672. While we applaud House support for ocean-related research and education programs in the National Science Foundation and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, we are deeply concerned with the significant funding cuts proposed for NOAA in FY 2007, reductions that compound those incurred by the agency in FY 2006.

The proposed funding cuts are being imposed at a time when there is clear recognition of the growing number and severity of problems that are compromising the health and associated economic benefits generated by our oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes. Last year economic and human health impacts were associated with major harmful algal blooms affecting the East Coast, West

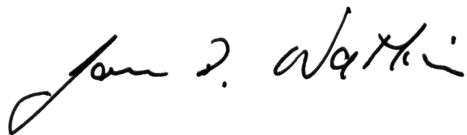
Coast, and Gulf of Mexico, as well as contributing to twenty thousand beach closures and advisories around the nation caused by excessive water pollution levels. Poor coastal land use planning and the loss of habitat contributed significantly to the massive losses endured by Gulf Coast residents and businesses associated with Hurricane Katrina. Inadequate research and monitoring are limiting our capacity to understand, predict, and mitigate these and many other problems plaguing our oceans and coasts.

Last month the Joint Initiative responded to a letter from ten Senators requesting our recommendations for the top ten actions Congress should take to implement the recommendations of the two Commissions. Our report, *From Sea to Shining Sea, Priorities for Ocean Policy Reform*, identifies key policy actions and offers specific funding suggestions for core ocean programs across the federal government. Almost half of the report's budgetary recommendations, totaling approximately \$350 million, were associated with NOAA programs. Examples of such programs include: implementation of an integrated ocean observing system; conservation and management programs such as coastal zone management, fisheries management, and national marine sanctuaries; and science activities such as ocean exploration, oceans and human health, as well as social and economic research. The report also recommends \$142 million to fund major National Science Foundation (NSF) programs supporting ocean research, and highlights the need for improved remote sensing capability associated with the National Aeronautic and Space Administration (NASA) earth sciences program.

We, like many others in the ocean community, remain very concerned that base funding for NOAA and other federal agency ocean programs is eroding as the need for investment in marine science and operations has never been greater. Support is needed for the constellation of programs within these agencies if we are going to be successful in our efforts to address the array of activities impacting the health of ocean resources. In particular, we are hopeful that the Committee will be able to provide additional funding, above the FY 2006 level, for ocean programs within NOAA, NSF and NASA in the FY 2007 CJS spending bill.

We appreciate your continued support for ocean science, management, and education and are available to assist in efforts to implement the recommendations of the Joint Initiative and our two Commissions. Please contact Laura Cantoral at 202-354-6444 if you would like additional information.

Sincerely,



James D. Watkins
Admiral, U.S. Navy (Retired)
Chairman, U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy



The Honorable Leon E. Panetta
Chair, Pew Oceans Commission