

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 07, 2008

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
and Science
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
and Science
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Ms. Chairwoman and Senator Shelby:

We request your assistance in including \$96 million in the Fiscal Year 2009 Commerce, Justice and Science appropriations bill, to ensure funding for the Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS) and the regional ocean observing associations under the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Ocean Service and to expand associated ocean and Great Lakes observation programs throughout NOAA. The United States leads the world in its commitment to understanding the oceans and how the oceans affect global climate change. While there is a significant focus on global climate change in the popular press and within Congress, only a small fraction of climate change research funding is available for ocean observations, despite the central role of the ocean in regulating climate and atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases.

The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, the US Ocean Action Plan, the Ocean Research Priorities Plan and scientific organizations everywhere agree on the crucial need for a comprehensive, sustained, and integrated ocean observing system to monitor the oceans and the Great Lakes. Yet, at present we lack such a system for the waters that cover nearly three-quarters of the Earth's surface. The benefits of a truly integrated ocean and coastal observing system would extend far beyond increasing our knowledge of the ocean and global climate change processes. Rather, it would contribute to ensuring national security, managing marine resources, reducing ocean pollution, improving maritime safety and efficiency, and mitigating natural hazards. Finally, such a system would require and foster cooperation with our international partners like the European Union and Japan, and should be an integral part of efforts to build climate observing systems in developing countries.

Although the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy recommended an initial annual budget of \$138 million for IOOS development, for Fiscal Year 2009, we recommend that the Committee support a total request of \$96 million: \$50 million for the regional observing systems, \$30 million for the NOAA IOOS program office and associated programs, \$10 million for data management and communications, and \$6 million for the global observing system. The majority of both the Committee's and the Administration's regional funding should be awarded through performance

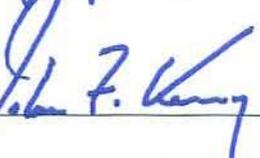
and merit-based multi-year contracts that promote the long-term investment and development of a sustained regional ocean observing system that meets local, state, and national needs.

While each of the above ocean observing components is vital to the overall IOOS system, we emphasize the need to dedicate \$50 million for the regional associations. In Fiscal Year 2005, Congress provided \$42.4 million to several regional observing systems to build and expand their capacity and performance. Many regional associations agreed to forego earmark requests in Fiscal Year 2008 in order to promote national program development; however, overall funding for these regional systems decreased to \$20.4 million that year. As a result, many regions have had to shut down high frequency radar systems, take buoys out of the water, stop collecting data for oceanographic and climate models, and eliminate vital decision tools and forecasts for coastal stakeholders – all of which are counterproductive to the purpose of providing continuous and comprehensive ocean data necessary to achieve the significant public benefits of IOOS.

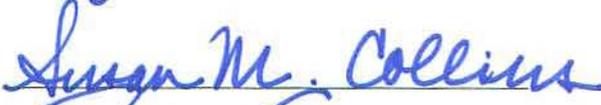
We urge you to commit now to support the development and implementation of an integrated ocean and coastal observing system. The program should be based on the promising steps already taken by NOAA, other federal agencies, and the regional associations, and will require funding that builds incrementally to about \$150 million annually as called for in S. 950, a bill backed by 16 bi-partisan co-sponsors that would authorize an integrated coastal and ocean observing system. We recognize this is a substantial investment but feel strongly that it is one we as a nation must make and will reap tremendous economic, environmental, and human health benefits. We ask that you make this important system a national science priority, as it well deserves.

Sincerely,





















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Joe Neuberger