

June 2, 2017

Testimony of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative to the U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs

Chairman Graham, Ranking Member Leahy, and other distinguished Members of the Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, we thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding the Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs appropriations bill. We are extremely concerned about the substantial proposed cuts to the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs at the State Department. If enacted, these cuts could undermine key elements of our national security and send a signal that we are abandoning our nation’s strong history of international leadership on marine and scientific issues.

The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative (Joint Initiative) is a collaborative, bipartisan effort to catalyze action and monitor progress toward meaningful ocean policy reform. We believe that maintaining strategic investments in U.S. ocean and scientific interests will save lives, enhance national security, grow our economy, and protect the health of our oceans, coasts, and communities.

Our testimony is derived from our newest report, the *Ocean Action Agenda: Supporting Regional Economies and Ecosystems*, and further informed by a series of regional ocean leadership roundtables that we convened in the Arctic and on the East, West, and Gulf Coasts. During these roundtables, we convened hundreds of industry, military, nonprofit, and tribal leaders, as well as local, state, and federal government officials representing the diverse needs of America’s coasts. Across regions and sectors, we heard strong support for federal programs that enable the United States to demonstrate strong ocean leadership on the international stage.

Based on the need for significant and sustained federal investment in ocean and scientific programs that we heard on every coast, we strongly support maintaining funding for the State Department’s Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES) at \$1 billion. OES programs advance U.S. strategic interests related to oceans, space, health, and science and bolster the power of U.S. diplomacy. While the Bureau’s total budget comprised less than one tenth of one percent of all federal discretionary spending in FY 2016, OES serves at the forefront of U.S. diplomatic efforts to confront some of world’s greatest challenges. OES works to build international consensus around pressing global issues such as combatting illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing and promotes sustainable ocean policy, Arctic diplomacy, science and technology cooperation, water security, and climate and space policy, among other vital topics.

Demonstrate International Leadership

The boundaries of our Exclusive Economic Zone and the global commons of the ocean are where we interact with the global community. Yet global changes are causing the ocean to become increasingly complex, dynamic, and competitive. Shipping traffic over traditional sea lanes is increasing, new trade routes are opening in the Arctic, and new technologies are making undersea resources more accessible. Sea ice loss has led to national security concerns for the United States as other nations exploit newly ice-free waters in the Arctic. Overfishing and illegal fishing are depleting global fish stocks and threatening livelihoods and economies. Plastic pollution, changing ocean chemistry, shifting ocean currents, and rising sea surface temperatures threaten the stability of marine ecosystems, which provide sustenance and economic opportunity for billions of people worldwide.

Without strong American leadership, these changes threaten to undermine U.S. strategic interests at home and abroad.

These problems facing our oceans are global in their severity and scope and require global solutions. American leadership on these and other ocean issues enhances our national security and provides both economic and environmental benefits. The State Department, and OES specifically, have positioned the United States as a leader in international ocean policy by supporting U.S. leadership in the Arctic, promoting innovative solutions to illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, and convening important international fora that bring together foreign ministers and other international leaders to focus on ocean issues and make commitments to address them. Continued support for OES would enable the current Administration to capitalize on the momentum of this leadership as it crafts its own international ocean legacy, while a reduction of support would create an international ocean policy void and squander years of diplomatic gains and goodwill. As the nation with the world's largest navy and strongest marine science enterprise, the United States is a critical player and its leadership is essential to global ocean stewardship, maritime commerce, and responsible ocean economic development.

Support Science and Research Globally

Cultivating science and research are important components of OES's mission to support U.S. foreign policy priorities. Positions such as the U.S. Science Envoy leverage U.S. expertise in science to support foreign policy objectives and advance opportunity, prosperity, and security worldwide. OES programs also leverage foreign partnerships to strengthen science, technology, and innovation to promote open systems of governance and sound decision making around the world. It is imperative for U.S. strategic interests that OES is provided with the capacity to continue these vital functions.

Concluding Remarks

The Joint Initiative greatly appreciates your commitment to stretching scarce resources to address the challenges of the world's greatest maritime nation. We will continue to track progress in advancing key ocean and coastal programs and accounts in FY 2018 and beyond. Thank you for considering our requests as the subcommittee begins its FY 2018 appropriations process. The Joint Initiative appreciates your attention to this matter and stands ready to assist you in advancing positive and lasting changes in the way we manage our nation's oceans and coasts.

Joint Initiative Co-Chairs and Leadership Council Members

The Honorable Christine Todd Whitman | The Honorable Norman Mineta | Frances Beinecke | Don Boesch | Lillian Borrone | The Honorable Norm Dicks | Quenton Dokken | Vice Admiral Paul Gaffney | Robert Gagosian | Sherri Goodman | Scott Gudes | The Honorable Conrad Lautenbacher | Margaret Leinen | Christopher Lischewski | The Honorable Jane Lubchenco | Julie Packard | The Honorable Leon Panetta | John Pappalardo | The Honorable Pietro Parravano | Diane Regas | Randy Repass
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