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Congress Takes Steps Toward Addressing Ocean Funding Crisis

Joint Ocean Commission Initiative Applauds Congress's Recognition of Oceans' Role in the Economy and Climate Change

June 23, 2008 (Washington, D.C.) – The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative applauds last week's action by the Senate Appropriations Committee to increase federal funding for ocean, coastal and Great Lake programs in its Commerce, Justice and Science (CJS) bill. The bill significantly increases funding for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), recommending an additional \$600 million for the agency. The bill also provides new funds for ocean research and education in the National Science Foundation, and earth satellite programs in the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. The House of Representatives CJS appropriations subcommittee has also proposed providing significant increases for ocean-related programs, but the details of their bill have not been released.

Through its annual Ocean Policy Report Card, the Joint Initiative highlighted the chronic underinvestment in ocean science, management and education programs and how this underfunding has jeopardized the health of our oceans, coasts and Great Lakes. These additional funds, if appropriated, will greatly expand networks used to monitor ocean conditions, help reduce water pollution, protect marine life, conserve fish stocks, and educate students and the public about the value of our oceans. More importantly, the funding will support programs essential to enhancing our understanding of the key role oceans play in driving climate processes, and how these changes will impact our economy and ecosystems.

“For years, ocean, coastal and Great Lake programs on the federal level have been dangerously underfunded and largely ignored. Families throughout the country are being forced to bear the cost of inaction through rising seafood costs, beach closures and responding to damage from coastal storms,” said the Honorable Leon E. Panetta, co-chair of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative. “With a struggling economy and uncertainty surrounding the rate and magnitude of climate change, now more than ever it is imperative that Congress fund programs that advance our understanding of the oceans’ role in driving this change, and help identify steps we can take now to minimize their impact on the economy and ecosystem.”

Specifically, the Senate bill would allocate \$4.5 billion in 2009 to NOAA, which includes increased funding to support environmental satellite construction and sensor development, advance climate change research and adaptation strategies, implement ocean and coastal observing systems, understand and forecast harmful algal blooms, and address the relationship between oceans and human health. Additional funding also supports improved fisheries management as mandated under the recently reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act, further coastal zone management and coastal community preparation for coastal storms, and expansion of efforts to conserve and maintain important marine habitats. Strengthening these programs is an essential step if we are to make progress towards the larger objective of establishing a comprehensive strategy for managing our oceans and coasts.

“Stewardship of our oceans cannot happen with words alone,” said Admiral James D. Watkins, (U.S. Navy, Ret.) co-chair of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative. “Senate leaders, guided in large part by Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) who chairs the CJS subcommittee, truly stepped up to the plate in approving much needed funding for ocean science, management and education, moving the nation one step closer to real action for our oceans.”

For more information on the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative and its work, please visit www.jointoceancommission.org.

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The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative is a collaborative effort of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and Pew Oceans Commission to catalyze ocean policy reform. The Joint Initiative is guided by a ten-member task force, five from each commission, and led by Admiral James D. Watkins (U.S. Navy, Ret.) and the Honorable Leon E. Panetta, chairs of the U.S. Commission and Pew Commission, respectively. The primary goal of the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative is to accelerate the pace of change that results in meaningful ocean policy reform.