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Views and Estimates
Committee on Science
Fiscal Year 2006

While we may agree with the general tone and recommendations in the Committee's Views and Estimates, we do not agree that the overall funding level proposed for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is sufficient. An example of the short-sightedness of such budget cuts: A recent article in the Washington Post reported that chronic under-funding of the National Weather Service budget in recent years – including a cut in the FY05 budget of $45 million below the FY04 budget – will potentially impact the delivery of weather services.

A proposed cut from FY05 funding for the agency overall of over $300 million dollars is not justifiable by simply restating the Administration's explanation that these funds were Congressional earmarks. Congress is constitutionally granted the power of the purse. The fact that Congress may disagree with the Administration about the appropriate level of funding or the desirability of a particular program does not by itself justify a cut to that program or its elimination. The tsunami warning system, which the Administration is now proposing to expand, is a recent example of a Congressional program that would not exist without Congress's interest and willingness to fund it.

In addition to funding shortfalls at the National Weather Service, other areas of NOAA's budget do not fare well when compared to the FY05 enacted budget and to the need for NOAA services. The Administration's budget cuts funding for the Oceanic and Atmospheric research (OAR) office by 10 percent from the FY05 enacted levels. Midterm to long-term research is essential if we are to achieve improvements in weather forecasting and resource management, NOAA's core operational missions. Our need for more refined information on climate and weather to support economic and resource management decisions across the nation has increased over time. Transportation, agriculture, forestry, ranching and hydropower generation are a few of the industries that rely on both short-term forecasting and long-term climate trend information for planning. We cannot generate this information if we do not continue to support the work of NOAA's laboratories and their academic partners.

We also need more information to address the resource management, conservation and pollution control issues impacting our oceans. Many of our fisheries are in trouble. Harmful algal blooms and hypoxic zones have increased in their frequency and intensity in a number of our coastal areas, creating human

health risks and resulting in significant economic costs to the communities that rely upon recreation and fishing for their livelihoods. The cuts to the OAR budget are proposed as the Ocean Commission has completed its report recommending the doubling of funding for ocean and coastal science.

We need to be realistic about the budget needed to support NOAA's activities. The Administration's budget is not realistic. If Congress enacts an overall budget level for NOAA consistent with the Administration's request, research and development and operational programs will suffer. NOAA's missions in weather forecasting, conservation and resource management and the employees who carry them out must be given adequate resources to deliver the services the public requires.

With respect to NASA, we echo the Committee's concern that many of NASA's plans remain ill-defined. However, we are equally troubled by a number of the decisions that NASA has *already* made as part of its FY 2006 budget request. For example, NASA has decided to eliminate funding for servicing the highly productive Hubble Space Telescope despite a unanimous recommendation by a distinguished National Academies committee that NASA should reinstate a Shuttle servicing mission to Hubble.

NASA has decided to impose a disproportionate share of the White House-mandated reduction in NASA's outyear funding plan on the Earth and space science programs, as well as on NASA's aeronautics research program. One particularly ill-advised consequence of that decision will be the necessity to terminate a number of scientifically productive missions – such as Voyager, Ulysses, and TRACE – late this year, with additional missions having to be terminated in late 2006.

NASA is eliminating essentially all research on the International Space Station that does not directly support the President's exploration initiative—thus walking away from investments in basic and applied research that NASA has long touted as providing important benefits to society—and in the process breaking faith with a research community that made career decisions on the basis of NASA's long-standing commitment to that research.

Finally, we are deeply troubled that in its haste to redirect its activities to support the President's exploration mission under questionable budgetary assumptions, NASA is seeking to make changes in its workforce that risk irretrievably losing highly skilled scientists and engineers from NASA's research Centers.

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