

Opinion

Posted on: Thursday, September 28, 2006

Letters to the Editor

CONGRESS

FURTHER NOAA BUDGET CUTS WOULD HARM HAWAII

It's that time of the year again when our representatives in Congress face one of their most important jobs: deciding the spending levels of government agencies for the upcoming fiscal year. This is no easy task considering the number of agencies and programs that are vital.

However, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is one agency that needs robust funding in order to continue its work ensuring public safety and protecting the state's ocean resources, coastal communities and economy.

NOAA's presence is important to Hawaii. It has weather- forecasting offices providing hurricane tracking and tsunami warnings, fisheries management and research laboratories ensuring sustainable seafood, marine navigation and mapping services, safeguarding boaters, and marine debris and other emergency response teams stationed around the state. NOAA also is entrusted with preserving and protecting two of America's underwater treasures, the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary and the recently designated Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National Monument.

Thanks to the leadership of Hawaii's senior senator, Daniel Inouye, his colleagues in the U.S. Senate recognized the value and importance of NOAA by proposing an appropriation of \$4.4 billion — this averages out to \$15 per person annually.

However, the U.S House of Representatives has proposed allocating nearly \$1 billion less! A similar discrepancy in last year's budget process resulted in a negotiated funding level causing major cuts to NOAA services. If allowed to happen again this year, it will further compromise the agency's ability to carry out its work of providing decisionmakers with data, products and services that promote and enhance the nation's economy, security, environment and quality of life.

We cannot continue to allow erosion of support for vital NOAA programs, such as habitat restoration and protection, marine protected areas and many other important services. That is why we urge all of Hawaii's congressional leaders to take a stand by supporting the U.S. Senate appropriation level for NOAA.

Lori Arguelles
President and CEO, National Marine Sanctuary Foundation