



Congress needs to restore the NOAA budget

EDITOR:

As the government's fiscal year draws to a close, the U.S. Congress faces one of its most important constitutionally mandated jobs: Determining the spending levels of various government agencies for the upcoming fiscal year.

Florida's federal representatives have a significant influence in this process, and the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation urges the several members of Congress who serve on the House and Senate appropriations committees to recognize the importance of robust funding for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

As residents of Florida well know, NOAA is vital to protecting the state's ocean resources, coastal communities and economy. NOAA is a strong presence in Texas, with weather forecasting offices, as well as fisheries management and research laboratories, stationed around the area. And this area is home to one of America's underwater treasures, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

The Senate has recognized the value and importance of NOAA and is proposing an appropriation of \$4.4 billion for NOAA, which averages out to about \$15 per person annually. For that small amount, each American receives weather forecasting, hurricane tracking, tsunami warnings, navigational information, fisheries management, hazard mitigation, oil spill response, habitat restoration, marine mammal protection, scientific research and local community assistance. NOAA affects and provides important services to all Americans. It's the best deal in government.

Unfortunately, there's a vast discrepancy in the requested appropriation, with the U.S. House allocating nearly \$1 billion less for NOAA's important work than the Senate. A similar discrepancy last year resulted in a negotiated funding level that imposed major cuts to NOAA services that if expanded this year, would further compromise the agency's ability to carry out its work of providing decision makers with critically important data, products and services that promote and enhance the nation's economy, security, environment and quality of life.

We recognize that the global landscape is challenging, especially with respect to funding needs. America's resources are required to support any number of critical enterprises, both at home and abroad. However, we cannot continue to allow erosion of support for NOAA programs that are vital to our economy and to the health and well being of every resident of this great nation.

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