



Funding necessary to preserve oceans

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USA TODAY contributor Nick Jans' column, "' A beginning' for conservation," well documents the successful work the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is doing to protect and manage what few Americans realize is one of our nation's most precious resources, our oceans (The Forum, July 26).

Despite this success, there is a storm brewing for the oceans that seriously threatens these programs. Necessary funding that ensures NOAA can continue to keep our beaches clean, our seafood safe, and our hurricane and storm forecasts accurate is caught in a riptide in Congress.

The House has proposed a half-billion-dollar cut in funding for key NOAA programs such as the ones Jans praised. This cut would be a 13% decline in the current NOAA budget. Conversely, the Senate moved to boost NOAA funding by \$536 million, more than three-quarters of a billion dollars above the president's budget request.

The diminished House funding, if enacted, could be a devastating blow to the security of our economy, safety, food supply and recreation. The only way economically and ecologically healthy oceans and coasts will survive and thrive is with a serious commitment and increased federal investment as set forth by the Senate, which we hope House and Senate members keep in mind as they gear up to hash out funding differences.

The ocean and coastal community appreciates your participation with us in bringing these important issues to your readers' attention.

Leon Panetta, Retired admiral **James Watkins**, Co-Chairs, Joint Ocean, Commission Initiative; Washington