9 May 2006

Honorable Richard C. Shelby, Chairman
Honorable Barbara A. Mikulski, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice and Science
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby and Ranking Member Mikulski:

As Member Representatives of the 66 U.S. research universities that belong to the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research (UCAR), the non-profit organization that manages the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR), we write to express our strong support for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the vital missions carried out by the agency on behalf of this country and its citizens.

NOAA’s importance to the nation was made glaringly evident to the world as Hurricane Katrina bore down on the Gulf Coast last fall. Without the R&D and operations behind the accurate forecasts and warnings that moved tens of thousands of people out of the region, the number of deaths caused directly by the storm would have been catastrophic. This is just one example of the manner in which NOAA data, research, and services contribute to the nation’s security, economy, environment, and quality of life, yet NOAA hurricane forecast R&D is also just one example of areas severely under funded in the FY07 request. NOAA provides a critical link for this nation between research results, research applications, technology development, and operations.

It is also important to appreciate that the atmospheric sciences have much to offer the nation as it seeks to strengthen its ability to innovate and compete in today’s global economy. The atmospheric and related sciences are inherently interdisciplinary, push the envelope high performance computing and technology development, test the boundaries of our data collection and analysis systems, and offer an effective training ground for future scientists and engineers. As the nation seeks to augment its investment in the physical sciences to increase its international competitiveness, we call on policy makers to recognize the integrated nature of the atmospheric sciences and to support an enhanced investment in these as well as other science and engineering disciplines as part of any long term economic competitiveness policy.

For NOAA to address all areas of concern and priority that have been identified by Congress, and to restore core funding that has decreased in recent years, we urge the Committee to fund NOAA at $4.5 billion for FY07 and to do so while maintaining vital, enhanced support for other portion’s of the Subcommittee’s research and development portfolio.
National Weather Service (NWS). The FY07 NWS request eases some of the extremely difficult pay raise pressures that were squeezing NWS operations to the breaking point and attempts to address some issues and programs that have been deferred in the past. In recent years, NWS has assumed responsibility for several programs such as the Space Environment Center (SEC), the US Weather Research Program (USWRP), and the Wind Profilers. SEC, the nation’s official source of space weather alerts and solar radiation warnings, was cut in FY06 from just over $7 million to less than $4 million. USWRP has not been able to adequately keep up with our international obligation to fund THORPEX, and has not yet implemented planned national activities for this international research program designed to accelerate improvements in the accuracy of one-to-14 day weather forecasts with deliverables such as improving disaster mitigation/response and increasing economic efficiency. The staff of the NOAA Profiler Network, 35 Doppler Radar sites that provide vital vertical wind profile data, has been cut back to the point that reliability and urgently required upgrades are severely compromised. The FY07 NWS request will allow these and other critical programs such as AWIPS and Local Warnings and Forecasts to barely meet minimum requirements. I urge the Committee to do everything possible to fund at least the President’s request of $881.86 million for the National Weather Service, a line office that provides the most critical of activities for policy makers, stakeholders, and citizens.

Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research (OAR). OAR conducts research and technology development that are the underpinnings for NOAA operations. If the requested amount is appropriated, OAR would receive a small increase to its base funding for FY07, some of which will keep the nation on track with its contribution to the international commitment of completing the ocean climate observing system by 2010. This is a high priority component within this country’s obligation to the construction of the international Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS). In addition, the increase will support drought impact research through the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS) and develop new data sets that will enhance operational climate prediction. Also within OAR, the Hurricane Research Division (HRD) works to improve the nation’s hurricane forecasts for both path and intensity. This is an activity the importance of which is obvious, post-Katrina, yet HRD funding, modest to begin with, is cut by over $1.0 million in the FY07 request. We urge the subcommittee to make every effort to at least support the President’s request for OAR — though a level closer to the amount contained in the Senate-passed bill for last year would allow for adequate funding for a number of very important research initiatives that would benefit the nation many ways.

National Environmental Satellite, Data and Information Service (NESDIS). NESDIS is responsible for managing all aspects of the remotely gathered environmental data that form the basis for environmental research meeting the needs of policy makers and users. The FY07 request provides a badly needed increase to cover basic operations and to provide additional funding for data archiving, and access and assessment activities at the NOAA National Data Centers that serve over 50,000 users annually. We urge the Committee to support the President’s FY07 request of $1,033.8 million for NESDIS.

Thank you for an opportunity to convey these views and for your stewardship of the nation’s scientific enterprise. As you know well, the future strength of the nation depends on the investments we make in science and technology today.
Sincerely,

Richard A. Anthes
President, UCAR

Donald Perkey
University of Alabama in Huntsville

Virgil (Buck) Sharpton
University of Alaska-Fairbanks

Joseph Zehnder
Arizona State University

James Anderson
Arizona State University

Steven L. Mullen
University of Arizona

Paul O. Wennberg
California Institute of Technology

Richard D. Grotjahn
University of California-Davis

Susan Ustin
University of California-Davis

Gudrun Magnusdottir
University of California-Irvine

Charles Zender
University of California-Irvine

Noboru Nakamura
University of Chicago

Fred Stafford
University of Chicago

David Noone
University of Colorado
Joseph Burns
Cornell University

Kerry F. Cook
Cornell University

James C. Wilson
University of Denver

Robert B. Ellingson
Florida State University

Barry J. Huebert
University of Hawaii

Thomas A. Schroeder
University of Hawaii

Donald J. Wuebbles
University of Illinois

Gregory R. Carmichael
University of Iowa

William Gallus
Iowa State University

Darryn Waugh
Johns Hopkins University

Darrell Strobel
Johns Hopkins University

Russell Dickerson
University of Maryland

James A. Hansen
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Chidong Zhang
University of Miami

Richard B. Rood
University of Michigan

Efi Foufoula Geogriou
University of Minnesota
Katherine M. Klink
University of Minnesota

Anthony Lupo
University of Missouri

Mark Potosnak
Nevada System of Higher Education

Vanda Grubisi
Nevada System of Higher Education

William P. Winn
New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology

Vincent P. Idone
State University of New York at Albany

Kenneth L. Demerjian
State University of New York at Albany

Gary M. Lackmann
North Carolina State University

Leonard J. Pietrafesa
North Carolina State University

Robert McGrath
The Ohio State University

John Snow
University of Oklahoma

Larry P. Atkinson
Old Dominion University

Eric J. Barron
Pennsylvania State University

Ernest M. Agee
Purdue University

Jeffrey Vitter
Purdue University

David M. Farmer
University of Rhode Island
John T. Merrill
University of Rhode Island

Arthur A. Few
Rice University

James R. Miller
Rutgers University

Alan Robock
Rutgers University

Carole Knight
St. Louis University

Robert Street
Stanford University

Mark Jacobson
Stanford University

Richard E. Orville
Texas A&M University

Mary Jo Richardson
Texas A&M University

Steven K. Krueger
University of Utah

Robert R. Gillies
Utah State University

Jennie Moody
University of Virginia

Matthew Hitchman
University of Wisconsin

Bruce F. Carmichael
Yale University