

# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE,  
AND TRANSPORTATION

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6125

April 27, 2010

The Honorable Robert C. Byrd  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Homeland Security  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,  
and Science  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable George Voinovich  
  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Homeland Security  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard C. Shelby  
  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,  
and Science  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairmen Byrd and Mikulski and Ranking Members Voinovich and Shelby:

As you consider the FY2011 appropriations for the Department of Commerce and Department of Homeland Security, we respectfully request you transfer \$15 million from the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund (OSLTF) to NOAA's Office of Response and Restoration (OR&R) to support its oil spill planning, research, and response obligations.

NOAA's OR&R provides scientific support for oil and chemical response and damage assessment in coastal water. During a major oil spill, OR&R provides critical scientific support to the Coast Guard and other federal, state and local agencies by determining where the spill might go, identifying sensitive habitats to protect, assessing impacts to natural resources, and developing cleanup strategies. OR&R also coordinates national and regional response plans, prepares area contingency plans, conducts training for federal, state and local partners, participates in national and regional spill drills, and develops assessment tools and techniques to simulate spill trajectory. OR&R responds to approximately 200 oil spills annually. Most immediately, OR&R's efforts have been integral to the Federal response to the Deepwater Horizon incident. Following the explosion and sinking of the mobile offshore drilling unit in the Gulf of Mexico, OR&R has provided invaluable information to the Coast Guard, the Minerals Management Service, and other response agencies.

However, current funding levels are not sufficient to permit OR&R to properly prepare for, respond to, and restore coastal areas impacted by oil spills. The additional funding will allow OR&R to conduct research to improve the effectiveness of oil spill response and

restoration; enhance its research into natural resource damage assessment capacity; and, update oil spill trajectory models and environmental sensitivity indices (ESI). The ESI maps of the Gulf Coast, for example, have not been updated since Hurricane Katrina dramatically reshaped the Louisiana coastline. This outdated information will hamper the efficiency of response efforts if oil from the Deepwater Horizon spill should reach the shore.

The Oil Pollution Act of 1990 authorized the use of the OSLTF to pay for cleanups and restoration when the polluter is unknown or exceeded their limit of liability. This fund supports federal agencies in oil spill recovery training, research and development, and preparedness through annual appropriations. Currently, NOAA is the only federal agency with a key role in oil spill response and preparedness that does not receive an annual appropriation from the OSLTF; therefore, we request the Committee provide funds to NOAA from OSLTF for this purpose.

The recent announcement by the Administration to increase energy exploration on the Outer Continental Shelf increases the need for OR&R to strengthen and improve modeling, mapping, and research for oil spill response and restoration. This added responsibility, combined with decreasing budgets and staffing over time, has created an expanding gap between the OR&R's level of preparedness and the response required by the Nation.

Transferring \$15 million from the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund to enhance NOAA's Office of Response and Restoration FY2011 budget request will strengthen NOAA's oil spill response and restoration research activities and improve our nation's level of readiness. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Maria Cantwell



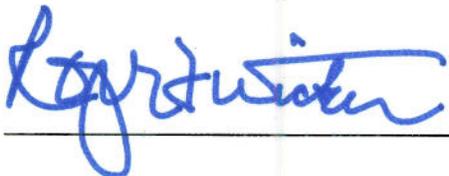
Olympia Snowe



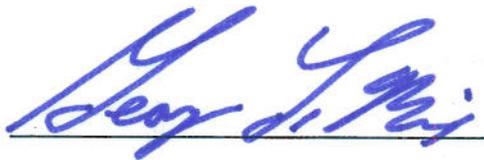
Bill Nelson



Mark Begich



Roger Wicker



George LeMieux