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Opening Statement of
Chairman John Fleming
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans, and Insular Affairs
On Thursday, April 18, 2013
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Subcommittee Oversight Hearing on

"Spending for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Council on Environmental Quality, the Office of Insular Affairs, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the President's Fiscal Year 2014 Budget Request for these Agencies"

Good morning. Today we will review the FY'14 budget requests of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Council on Environmental Quality, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Office of Insular Affairs.

In terms of the Fish and Wildlife Service, the agency fails to do its part to reduce our nearly \$17 trillion dollar national debt by asking for an increase of \$94 million. In fact, the only two major programs the agency proposes to decrease are construction and the National Wildlife Refuge Fund.

Instead, the Service proposes to nearly quadruple the amount of money for land acquisition and they seek generous increases for the Cooperative Endangered Species Fund, the Endangered Species Act Program and the operations of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Instead of reducing their accounts by five or ten percent, they come before us today with this unrealistic request.

The Service is obsessed with acquiring through either fee title or conservation easements an endless amount of private property. It is a question of priorities. With a more than \$3 billion maintenance backlog within the National Wildlife Refuge System and the National Fish Hatchery System, you might expect that the Service would request more money to complete some of the hundreds of "mission critical" projects. Instead, they have asked for a slight increase for maintenance compared to land acquisition, leaving no doubt that land acquisition remains the agency's highest priority.

I also continue to be concerned about the high level of funding necessary for the NOAA satellite programs. These huge budget requests for individual satellites are not just one-time requests. These billion dollar programs seem to be unending with new program requests and new proposed satellites every year. And I am not the only one who is concerned about this. A recent quote

from the Senate Appropriations Chairwoman, Senator Mikulski (D-MD) summed it up quite well, “an out-of-control NOAA weather satellite program could eat our committee’s appropriation alive. It would just really be a carnivorous whale.”

While the Administration has increased funding for fishery stock assessments, cooperative research, and better data collection, I am concerned that the 11 percent increase for NOAA in this budget request is unrealistic. When reality hits and when cuts are required, we will be left with huge satellite budgets while important economic drivers like stock surveys and assessments will be cut again.

Today, we will also examine funding provided to the Office of Insular Affairs which supports activities in the territories and the Freely Associated States.

The Office of Insular Affairs budget’s general statement includes gross domestic product data for the first time for the territories. Part of the budget statement reads “the resulting GDP estimates released in July 2011 shed light on serious challenges faced in the territories and brought in to focus the vulnerability of their small undiversified economies.”

The data showed increases in real gross domestic product for all of the territories in 2010. However, the budget document notes that many of the increases in territorial gross domestic product were dependent on increased local government spending using federal dollars. The 2010 time frame of the increase reflects stimulus funding. I would like to note, as the budget document does, that the 2010 data for the U.S. Virgin Islands is before the closure of the Hovensa refinery in 2012. This closure is having a huge impact on energy prices in the territory and epitomizes the fragility of territorial economies.

Finally, I am concerned that the National Ocean Policy Implementation Plan - which was released on Tuesday - contains no estimates of the cost of the 200+ actions that Federal agencies will be required to implement. While some of these actions are as simple as coordinating activities, the fact that coastal and marine zoning activities are on-going and the bureaucracy associated with the Executive Order is already in place, there is clearly a budgetary impact which is hidden from view.

Despite a lot of new rhetoric in the Implementation Plan, I still am concerned that this National Ocean Policy has no statutory basis, creates uncertainty for the regulated community, will create marine and coastal zoning plans without direct stakeholder input, will lead to new restrictions on inland activities, and is taking financial resources away from existing priorities of Federal agencies.