

Committee on Resources

Chairman's Statement

The Honorable Jim Saxton (R-AK), Chairman,
Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans
Hearing Concerning the FY 1998
Budget Request for
the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration:
February 27, 1997.

Today we will be hearing from Dr. D. James Baker, Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere, regarding the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Fiscal Year 1998 budget request.

NOAA is requesting roughly level funding for Fiscal Year 1998, and I am pleased that the total funding for three line offices which this Subcommittee oversees -- the National Ocean Service, the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research -- is up slightly from the current fiscal year. Nonetheless, there are some ongoing issues that are of continuing concern. Among these concerns are cuts to the National Sea Grant College Program and the National Undersea Research Program; the lack of funding to update and modernize navigation services; and the continuing lack of a plan to deal with the future of the NOAA Commissioned Officers Corps.

In January 1996, NOAA announced its intention to disestablish the Corps on April 1, 1997. We are little more than a month from that target date, and more than a year from the original announcement, yet no plan to disestablish the Corps has been forthcoming. This uncertainty is leading to poor morale within the agency, and to planning problems for agency offices. I look forward to hearing from Dr. Baker today when NOAA will deliver its plan to disestablish the Corps or when it intends to withdraw the proposal. Corps officers have spent their careers providing the Federal Government with technical knowledge and expertise. It is simply not fair to repay them with this sort of uncertainty and lack of attention.

Dr. Baker, thank you for coming today, and I look forward to your testimony. You should know that I remain committed to obtaining adequate resources for the many vital programs under your agency's jurisdiction.

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