

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 30, 2026

Mr. Brian Stone
Acting Director
National Science Foundation
Randolph Building, 401 Dulany St.
Alexandria, VA 22314

Dear NSF Acting Director Stone:

Thank you for your June 18th decision to reverse course on the descoping and removal of the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Ocean Observatories Initiative (OOI). We are grateful for your responsiveness to our calls and those of stakeholders to preserve this vital, one-of-a-kind ocean monitoring network that so many Americans rely on.

In the NSF update on the OOI, NSF committed to "not proceed with further removal or descoping of equipment from the remaining arrays and will continue operations including planned maintenance. While the Endurance Array has been removed from the water, we are developing plans to redeploy the equipment after servicing." We understand and appreciate that NSF moved expeditiously following this statement to initiate OOI rescoping for the Endurance Array, including the approval of budget authority and ship time needed to resume some of the operational capabilities of the Endurance Array.

We are grateful for NSF's commitment to resume full OOI operations and understand that there are ongoing budget complexities and uncertainties within the agency. We respectfully request an update on NSF's efforts to restore all OOI operational capabilities, including the Endurance Array, with information on the status of rescoping activities approved with budget as well as rescoping activities requested but still awaiting budget authority approval. Budget uncertainties impact the OOI program's ability to retain the necessary personnel to operate and maintain the OOI, and we urge NSF to provide the budget certainty needed to hire and retain the personnel for redeployment, as well as ongoing operations and maintenance.

Additionally, the NSF's June 18th statement indicates the agency's intention to issue a Dear Colleague Letter (DCL) to collect input from a diverse array of stakeholders, while convening an expert panel to assess ocean observational needs, evaluate available data sources, consider responses from stakeholders, and help the NSF identify a sustainable path for ocean observing systems. We eagerly await the issuance of the NSF's DCL. For this review, we encourage due consideration of input from and inclusion on the review panel of a broad range of representatives including users and stakeholders of ocean observing facilities. We also urge a transparent process for conducting the review, recommendations, and implementation plans. Finally, we ask that NSF brief us on the recommendations and implementation plans prior to finalization. We look forward to collaborating with the agency, communities, and experts to unlock the next generation of improved ocean monitoring and high-tech data collection.

This decades-long initiative offers exciting opportunities to take America's ocean observing capabilities to the next level, and we welcome this opportunity to work with you, coastal communities, academic institutions, and industry technology providers to ensure the U.S. seizes this opportunity to improve ocean data systems that serve such a diverse array of American communities.

Thank you, again, for your decision to reevaluate the descoping of the OOI, and for your continued engagement with us as NSF works to restore operations. This complex monitoring network is critical for the safety of Americans and our understanding of dynamic marine ecosystems. We look forward to working with the NSF and our dedicated university research teams to assess and redeploy the OOI and Endurance Array as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jeffrey A. Merkley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent horizontal line at the end.

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lisa Murkowski". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line at the end.

Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator