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REPORT BY THE U.S.

# General Accounting Office

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## NSF's Award Of Two Research Vessels Met Requirements

In 1981, NSF acquired two new oceanographic coastal zone research vessels. The award of the first vessel to the University of Miami was proper since its proposal was rated highest by the evaluation panel on scientific considerations and it was estimated to decrease fleet operating costs and excess fleet capacity. The award of the second vessel was also proper since the Duke/UNC consortium was the only offeror which met all of the procurement requirements.



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GAO/PAD-82-14

JUNE 28, 1982

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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

PROGRAM ANALYSIS  
DIVISION

B-201215

The Honorable Slade Gorton  
United States Senate

The Honorable Henry M. Jackson  
United States Senate

The Honorable William V. Roth, Jr.  
United States Senate

In a January 15, 1981, letter (see appendix I) Senator Gorton asked us to complete our review, originally initiated by Senator Warren G. Magnuson, of the appropriateness of the National Science Foundation's (NSF) award of two new oceanographic coastal zone research vessels to east coast institutions--the University of Miami and the Duke/UNC consortium. 1/ As agreed with his office, we have addressed three questions.

--What is the distribution of academic research vessels between the east and west coasts?

--How are these vessels used?

--Were NSF's award decisions appropriate and proper?

Subsequently, on January 21, 1981, Senator Jackson requested that we complete the work initiated by Senator Magnuson (see appendix II). On January 29, 1981, Senator Roth asked us to complete the work (see appendix III) and asked that we also address the following questions:

--Are there sufficient research vessels on the east coast without adding two new coastal research vessels?

--Should the proposal evaluators and senior NSF officials have conducted site visits?

--Are the University of Delaware facilities superior?

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1/The Duke/UNC consortium is composed of Duke University and four campuses of the University of North Carolina system.

In this letter, we respond to all three of these requests. We provide information on the distribution and use of ships. In regard to whether NSF's award decisions were appropriate and proper, the award of the first vessel to Miami was proper since Miami was rated highest by the official NSF evaluation panel on scientific considerations and assignment of the vessel to Miami was estimated to decrease annual fleet operating costs by about \$750,000 because a large vessel was retired. The assignment of the second coastal research vessel as a replacement for the EASTWARD, Duke's coastal research vessel, was also proper since the Duke/UNC consortium was the only offeror which met all of the procurement requirements.

The two new coastal research vessels were not additions to the east coast--they were replacements, and they did not directly increase capacity. As to site visits and whether the University of Delaware facilities were superior, we know of no requirement that a procuring agency inspect facilities offered in response to a request for proposals. Delaware ranked eighth of the nine proposals submitted. NSF believed that Delaware's overall low rating would not have risen enough to affect the award decision even if a site visit had resulted in a higher rating of its personnel and facilities.

We conducted our evaluation primarily at NSF in Washington, D.C. The review was made in accordance with generally accepted government audit standards. We reviewed the proposals submitted to NSF, reports of the groups that evaluated the proposals, records showing the use of the fleet, and various correspondence and reports related to the fleet. We also interviewed officials from the National Science Foundation, and from other organizations with information relevant to the decision including the University-National Oceanographic Laboratory System (UNOLS), the Cape Fear Technical Institute, and the universities of Washington (representing the Northwest Marine Sciences consortium), Delaware, and Duke (representing the Duke/UNC consortium).

#### BACKGROUND

The primary mission of NSF is to strengthen U.S. science by supporting basic research, science education programs, and applied research on selected national problems. One major research area deals with expanding the understanding of the ocean and its relationship to human activities. NSF's ocean science program includes funding for an academic oceanographic research fleet, consisting of 25 vessels operated by 16 different academic institutions. The Navy owns 8 of these vessels; NSF, 7; and the academic institutions, 10. Use of the fleet is coordinated by UNOLS, which promotes efficient use and maintenance of the academic fleet.

NSF's fiscal year 1982 budget for ocean sciences is \$75.8 million. Of this, \$29 million is for renovating, equipping, and operating the academic vessels and will provide about 70 percent

of the funds required to support the fleet. The remaining support comes from other Federal sources--Office of Naval Research, U.S. Geological Survey, Bureau of Land Management, Department of Energy, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Environmental Protection Agency--and from State and private sources.

In 1978, NSF told the Congress that it needed new vessels specifically designed to perform coastal research since the need for coastal research, which involves studies of the marine environment of the U.S. coastal zone including the outer continental shelf, had been increasing. The Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 (P.L. 92-583) established a national policy to encourage and assist the participation of the public, of Federal, State, and local governments, and of regional agencies, in the development of State coastal zone management programs. Subsequently, coastal research needed by Federal agencies and State and local governments increased. Recognizing that energy and pollution problems were accelerating the need for research in the coastal regions, NSF supported a study to design an effective and economical coastal research vessel. The new vessel was designed to provide a stable, seaworthy platform for new and expanded studies of coastal and near-shore processes such as movement and mixing of water masses, dynamics of continental shelf organisms, and the role of suspended particles in seaward transport of chemicals.

DISTRIBUTION OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH VESSELS  
BETWEEN THE EAST AND WEST COASTS AND THEIR USE

The following table describes the 25 vessels in the academic fleet on December 31, 1981, after two vessels were replaced with new coastal vessels.

NSF officials informed us that the various classes of vessels in the fleet have different patterns of use which depend primarily on their size and design. NSF's full use criteria are based on those operating days away from home port that are incident to scientific research.

Large vessels over 200 feet in length are used primarily for worldwide, deep-water, and continental shelf research. During calendar year 1980, the six large vessels in the fleet were used a total of 1,261 days. Full use for a large vessel is at least 260 days per year. The average use for five of the six large vessels was 252 days and individual vessel use ranged from 159 to 322 days. The sixth vessel was laid up for lack of work. NSF officials believe that this underuse reflected a continuing surplus fleet capacity problem associated with the large vessels. We examined cruise reports for the academic fleet covering calendar year 1980 and found that less than 5 percent of the large vessel use was devoted to coastal zone research.

Table 1Description of Academic Fleet

<u>Size</u>	<u>Number of Vessels</u>		<u>Principal Use</u>
	<u>East Coast</u>	<u>West Coast</u>	
Large, 200+ ft.	3	3	Worldwide, deep-water, and continental shelf research averaging about 40 days per voyage.
Intermediate, 150-199 ft.	4	3	Worldwide, deep-water, and continental shelf research averaging about 30 days per voyage.
Coastal, 100-149 ft.	3	2	Short cruises, primarily on the U.S. continental shelf.
Small, less than 100 ft.	3	4	Short cruises, primarily in sheltered U.S. waters.
Total	13	12	

Intermediate class vessels range from 150 to 199 feet in length and are used for worldwide, deep-water, and continental shelf research. During calendar year 1980, eight intermediate class vessels were in the fleet and were used 1,942 days. Full use for an intermediate class vessel is at least 240 days per year. These vessels were in use an average of 243 days and individual vessel use ranged from 173 to 366 days. We found that, on the average, most intermediate class vessels were used for coastal zone research for about one-third of their 1980 schedules.

Coastal zone research vessels, ranging from 100 to 149 feet in length, are used primarily for short cruises on the U.S. continental shelf. During calendar year 1980, the four coastal zone research vessels were used 655 days. Full use for a coastal zone research vessel is at least 225 days per year. These vessels were in use an average of 164 days and individual vessel use ranged from 131 to 230 days. Three of the coastal zone research vessels were affected by various factors which contributed to lower use than that expected for a coastal zone research vessel. One vessel, because it was over 30 years old, was not in much demand by scientists; another was being retrofitted for use in arctic waters; and the third was a specialized catamaran whose use is limited to the Chesapeake Bay. Vessels smaller than 100 feet in length averaged 139 days of use and ranged from 78 to 186 days. Full use for a small vessel is at least 150 days per year. These vessels are used primarily in sheltered U.S. waters.

NSF officials stated that adding two new coastal research vessels to the fleet without releasing or retiring older vessels of equivalent or larger size would only increase surplus ship capacity. NSF expects the underuse of the large vessels to continue.

WERE NSF'S AWARD DECISIONS  
APPROPRIATE AND PROPER?

In early 1979, NSF solicited proposals for the construction and operation of one or more coastal zone research vessels. The solicitation listed the following four criteria which would be used to evaluate the proposals, all related to the scientific and managerial capabilities of the bidders:

- the extent and quality of the marine research programs of the applicants;
- the match of scientific requirements to the capabilities of the ship;
- the adequacy of the construction plan and capability of applicants to carry out a major procurement; and
- the degree of existing or planned capability to operate a ship of this class efficiently and effectively.

Although not set forth as a separate criterion, the solicitation also stated that cost would be an overall consideration, because the effort could not be undertaken unless it could be fully funded within the appropriation available. Proposers were also requested to identify any ship or ships that would be replaced by the assignment of the new vessel. The evaluation was to be conducted in two steps--an advisory group of experts from outside NSF was to make an initial rating of the proposals and would submit its recommendations for consideration by an NSF evaluation panel, which would make the final award recommendation.

NSF received and evaluated proposals from nine bidders. Five of the nine proposals, including eighth-ranked Delaware, were rejected. Three of the four remaining bidders represented associations of universities or institutions in their proposals for the assignment of a new coastal vessel (the exception was the University of Miami Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science). One bidder, the Duke/UNC consortium, consisted of Duke University and the four campuses of the University of North Carolina system--Raleigh, Chapel Hill, Wilmington, and Greenville. Another bidder, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, was representing the New England Cooperative Coastal Research Facility Association, which consists of 23 member institutions in New England. The University of Washington was representing the Northwest Marine Sciences consortium, consisting of the University of Alaska, the University of Washington, and Oregon State University.

NSF's proposal evaluation procedure  
used a two-step process

A preliminary evaluation was performed by an ad hoc advisory committee, a group of experts independent of NSF formed to advise NSF's selection panel, which would make the final recommendation. The ad hoc group's evaluation was based on the four criteria from the NSF solicitation. During its deliberations, the ad hoc group also attempted to resolve certain problems pertaining to the whole fleet, such as limited funding for operations, regional distribution of vessels, and their use. Information on these problems had been provided to the group by NSF program officials as background information. How the institutions proposed to remedy these problems was part of the ad hoc group's evaluation process.

The ad hoc group ranked the Washington consortium proposal first with the condition that Washington would release its large vessel, the THOMPSON. Miami was ranked second and Woods Hole was ranked third. The ad hoc group rejected the Duke/UNC proposal and urged the reconditioning of Duke's coastal research vessel, the EASTWARD.

The rankings of the official NSF evaluation panel were not identical to those of the ad hoc group. The panel's first evaluation, based strictly on scientific considerations, ranked Miami first, Woods Hole second, and Washington third. After considering the ad hoc group's recommendations and vessel use patterns, the panel again ranked Miami first. Washington advanced to second place, with Woods Hole third. In the panel's opinion, Miami ranked ahead of Washington because its proposal rated highest on scientific considerations and because it had proposed to give up its large vessel, the GILLISS, in return for assignment of the new coastal research vessel.

Duke/UNC received a lower ranking on scientific considerations than either Washington or Woods Hole. The panel was unable to reach unanimity regarding the Duke/UNC proposal. Their mixed review of this proposal paralleled the discussions of the ad hoc group which had rejected the Duke/UNC proposal. Three of the five panel members believed that the existing vessel was adequate. The panel decided to set the Duke/UNC proposal aside, but stopped short of recommending outright rejection in the event that negotiations could not be successfully concluded with any of the three top ranked applicants. On May 29, 1979, the NSF evaluation panel recommended that the first coastal research vessel be awarded to the University of Miami <sup>1/</sup> since it had proposed to give up its large ship, the GILLISS.

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<sup>1/</sup>Miami ultimately was selected to construct both vessels, so that negotiations for the second vessel concerned only the contract for its operation.



NSF recommends construction  
of the second vessel

The Director of NSF, on September 14, 1979, recommended that the National Science Board approve funding for the construction and operation of a second coastal research vessel in 1980. He stated that the award of the first vessel in 1979 to the University of Miami had set a cost-benefit standard for assigning the second vessel and future vessels because the first vessel would replace a 208 foot vessel, the GILLIS, costing twice as much to operate. He also stated that this standard would be applied in negotiating among the three remaining contenders (Washington, Woods Hole, and Duke/UNC) for assigning the second vessel to achieve the best possible improvement in fleet inventory and savings in annual fleet operating costs.

NSF negotiations for  
assignment of the second vessel

On December 28, 1979, NSF invited the three remaining contenders (Washington, Woods Hole, and Duke/UNC) to Washington, D.C., during January 1980, to negotiate the assignment of the second vessel. NSF informed the contenders of the requirement that the assignment could not increase overall fleet costs and that it would preferably effect a decrease, and that the assignment could not increase and would preferably reduce excess ship time.

On February 15, 1980, NSF communicated final terms and conditions for the assignment of the second coastal research vessel to the three contenders as follows:

Washington

1. Retirement of the THOMPSON [large, 200+ ft.]; or
2. An equivalent reduction in fleet inventory and costs such as alternate year layups of the THOMPSON and a comparable ship; and
3. A satisfactory plan for outfitting the second vessel, preferably by retiring the THOMPSON.

Woods Hole

1. Retiring the LULU, a 105 ft. catamaran dedicated to support the deep submersible research vessel ALVIN; or
2. Alternate year layups of the KNORR [large, 200+ ft.] and the ATLANTIS II [large, 200+ ft.]; or
3. An agreement with another institution that would offer a similar reduction.

Duke/UNC

1. Full, formal, and endorsed statements on their consortium arrangement; and
2. Agreement to sell the EASTWARD outside the academic research community, and to apply all proceeds of the sale to the costs of constructing or outfitting one or both of the new vessels; and
3. A commitment by the consortium to operate the new vessel in the Northeast region above Cape Hatteras; and
4. Ensurance that the Beaufort Marine Lab would remain in service for the term of the assignment.

During the period between September 1979 and February 1980, NSF had translated its general requirements to achieve the best possible improvement in fleet inventory and savings in annual fleet operating costs into the specific conditions discussed above that were tailored to the assets of the competing institutions. NSF indicated that great weight would be given to the cost and ship use requirements and that in no case would the second vessel be assigned in a way which increased total fleet costs or added to the likelihood of surplus ship time.

On April 17, 1980, NSF program officials recommended that the second coastal research vessel be awarded to the Duke/UNC consortium. This recommendation was based on Duke/UNC's agreement to meet the above conditions and the proposed additional commitment of about \$250,000 in State of North Carolina funds for State-funded technician training programs at the Cape Fear Technical Institute and other State uses. The University of Washington and the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution proposals were judged to result in increased fleet operating costs.

The award decisions

Miami was rated highest by the official NSF evaluation panel on scientific considerations. The award of the first vessel to Miami in September 1979 was estimated to decrease annual fleet operating costs by about \$750,000 and reduced excess fleet capacity by the release of Miami's large vessel, the GILLISS.

NSF had imposed two additional requirements on the bidders for the second coastal vessel contract--that their proposals could not increase either total fleet operating costs or surplus ship time. We looked at the role played by those requirements in the award process and whether NSF gave appropriate weight to the cost and ship use factors. In awarding the second vessel, NSF gave determinative weight to the cost and ship use factors over scientific merit. Evaluating proposals is considered the procuring agency's exclusive responsibility, since it bears the risk of

unsatisfactory performance. 1/ Accordingly, the fact that the added requirements were determinative of the award is not itself objectionable.

Determining the Government's minimum needs is within the jurisdiction of the procuring agency and will not be questioned unless the agency's decision is clearly unreasonable. 2/ NSF decided that it could achieve needed economies for the entire fleet by making the effect of the contract award on fleet use and costs a factor in its evaluation of the proposals. NSF imposed the conditions with a view toward better management of the total fleet and a better use of its contributions to the operation of the fleet. Although there may have been other ways of achieving these goals, this does not affect the reasonableness of NSF's decision. 3/ NSF wanted to be sure that this award would not have an adverse effect on the other vessels whose operation is supported by NSF, and imposing the cost and ship use requirements was a reasonable means of reaching that end.

By adding the fleet cost and ship use requirements, NSF in effect amended its original solicitation. A solicitation may be modified in response to changing needs, as long as all bidders are notified of the change and are given an opportunity to respond. 4/ NSF appears to have properly modified the solicitation, since all bidders were notified of the change and were given an equal opportunity to respond to the new requirements.

Both Washington and Woods Hole replied in March 1980 that they would not consent to NSF's conditions. However, Duke/UNC did agree to retire a vessel as suggested by NSF. Duke/UNC also proposed to reduce costs by transferring equipment from the vessel being sold to outfit the new vessel and securing additional State funds for its operation.

### Conclusions

The award of the first vessel to Miami was proper since Miami was rated highest by the official NSF evaluation panel on

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1/See, e.g., Buffalo Organization for Social and Technological Innovation, B-196279, February 7, 1980.

2/See, e.g., 54 Comp. Gen. 612, 615 (1975).

3/See, e.g., Swingline Inc., B-200019, May 4, 1981.

4/While the Federal procurement regulations do not address amendment of a solicitation before negotiations, they do recognize that modifications are made during negotiations and require that a written amendment be sent to all bidders. 41 C.F.R. §1-3.805-1(d). See also 41 C.F.R. §1-2.207 (advertised procurements).

scientific considerations and assignment of the vessel to Miami was estimated to decrease fleet operating costs by about \$750,000 because a large vessel was retired.

The assignment of the second vessel as a replacement for the EASTWARD was also proper since the Duke/UNC consortium was the only offeror which met all of the procurement requirements.

ARE THERE SUFFICIENT RESEARCH VESSELS  
ON THE EAST COAST WITHOUT ADDING  
TWO NEW COASTAL RESEARCH VESSELS?

The two new coastal zone research vessels were assigned as replacements for older vessels which were removed from the east coast fleet. The replacement of the GILLISS reduced fleet capacity and the replacement of the EASTWARD was an even trade. However, on the east coast the competition between the intermediate class vessels and the two new coastal vessels is heightened by the presence of six vessels which are either new or less than 10 years of age that are well suited to performing coastal research. Furthermore, the popularity of the intermediate class vessels for this kind of work is higher than that of the new coastal vessels. NSF officials informed us that in 1982 at least one of the new coastal vessels may be underused in terms of developing a full schedule of at least 225 operating days. Actual use may be only about 160 days. However, they believe that in the future (1983), the two new coastal research vessels will be fully used at a combined level of over 450 days per year.

NSF has not developed any projection of future use requirements by class of vessel. NSF efforts have been devoted to reducing the number of vessels larger than 200 feet in length. The replacement of these large vessels with coastal vessels is not on a one-for-one basis regarding suitability for the same kind of work. The large Navy vessels are more expensive to operate and are best suited to deep-water, worldwide oceanography. The replacement comes about because the new coastal vessels, through a rippling effect, are able to take on some of the coastal work being performed on the intermediate class vessels, which in turn can take over some of the deep-water oceanography from the large vessels.

In summary, the two new coastal research vessels were not additions to the east coast, they were replacements. They did not directly increase capacity.

SHOULD THE PROPOSAL EVALUATORS AND SENIOR NSF  
OFFICIALS HAVE CONDUCTED SITE VISITS?

The University of Delaware expressed concern that neither the proposal evaluators nor senior NSF officials had visited the competing institutions to evaluate their personnel and facilities. (see appendix III).

According to the NSF evaluation panel, site visits were not made for two reasons. First, they are not mandatory and are not generally conducted unless it is believed they will yield information that could significantly affect the award decision. Each applicant's proposal was required to contain a detailed description of its personnel and facilities. Delaware's proposal described, among other factors, the institution's physical facilities, its College of Marine Studies, and its marine operations personnel. The proposal included a map of the university's harbor and buildings, and a floor plan of the marine operations building. In the NSF evaluation panel's opinion, information of this type, together with the evaluators' firsthand knowledge of the institution, was sufficient to make a sound award decision.

Second, the quality of each institution's personnel and facilities was only one factor in the evaluation process. The principal evaluation criteria included the extent and quality of the applicant's marine research programs, the match of scientific requirements to the capabilities of the ship, the adequacy of the construction plan and capability of applicants to carry out a major procurement, the degree of existing or planned capability to operate a ship of this class efficiently and effectively, and the effect on overall fleet operating costs. Based on all the evaluation considerations, Delaware ranked eighth of the nine proposals submitted. NSF believed that Delaware's overall low rating would not have risen enough to affect the award decision even if a site visit had resulted in a higher rating of its personnel and facilities.

We know of no requirement that a procuring agency inspect facilities offered in response to a request for proposals. Rather, the procuring agency simply must treat all offerors fairly and equally. 1/

#### ARE THE UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE FACILITIES SUPERIOR?

As documented in the NSF evaluation panel's findings, the evaluators had some knowledge of Delaware's personnel and facilities and were not entirely satisfied with them. The evaluators noted that Delaware's coastal program was shore-based and did not have adequate personnel to form a sufficiently strong research program, that its current vessel was primarily used for industrial monitoring programs rather than basic research, that its facilities were excellent but difficult to reach by commercial transportation, that the channel had not been dredged adequately for a new coastal research vessel, and that the staff would be over-extended by the operating demands of the new vessel.

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1/See, e.g., B-201969, September 29, 1981.

AGENCY COMMENTS

NSF reviewed a draft of this report and agrees with its contents. Its letter is included as appendix IV.

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A copy of this report is being sent to the Director of the National Science Foundation and to Senator Joseph Biden and Representative Joel Pritchard, who expressed an interest in our review, and to other interested parties.

Sincerely yours,



Morton A. Myers  
Director

Enclosures

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 ELIZABETH TANKERSLEY, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

## United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET  
 WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

January 15, 1981

The Honorable Elmer B. Staats  
 Comptroller General of the United  
 States  
 441 G Street, N.W.  
 Washington, D.C. 20548

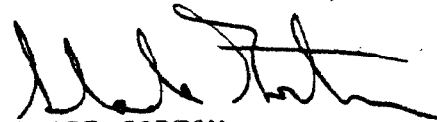
Dear Mr. Staats:

During the past year you undertook, at the request of Senator Magnuson, an analysis of the National Science Foundation's oceanographic vessel funding policy. I am interested in our nation's policy toward supporting marine activities and, therefore, request that you continue your study of this issue.

I am enclosing for your information correspondence to me from Dr. James Baker of the University of Washington outlining some of the concerns in this matter. I would appreciate your informing me of the present status of your study on this inquiry and your estimated timetable for completing the study.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,



SLADE GORTON  
 United States Senator

SG/ckv  
 Enclosures  
 cc: Dr. James Baker

HENRY M. JACKSON, WASH., CHAIRMAN

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## United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON  
 ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
 WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

January 21, 1981

Honorable Elmer B. Staats  
 Comptroller General of the United States  
 General Accounting Office  
 Washington, D.C. 20548

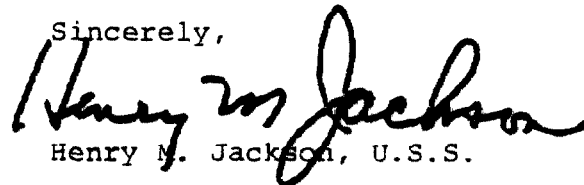
Dear Mr. Comptroller General:

Enclosed is a copy of a letter which Senator Magnuson sent to you in August of last year requesting a GAO analysis of policy and funding decisions of the National Science Foundation regarding the awarding of oceanographic vessels.

It is my understanding that this analysis is currently underway by the GAO staff. Because Senator Magnuson is no longer a member of the Senate, I would like to let you know of my interest and support for this study. I believe that an objective GAO consideration of this issue will be very beneficial, and I would appreciate being advised of the results of this analysis when it is completed.

With best wishes,

Sincerely,

  
 Henry M. Jackson, U.S.S.

HMJ:jmm  
 Enclosure



WILLIAM V. ROTH, JR.  
DELAWARE

3215 DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING  
TELEPHONE: 202-224-2441

## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

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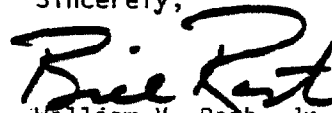
January 29, 1981

The Honorable Elmer B. Staats  
Comptroller General of the United States  
General Accounting Office  
441 G Street  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Staats:

Please find enclosed a letter from President E.A. Trabant of the University of Delaware. The letter expresses President Trabant's desire to see GAO finalize a study, originally initiated by Senator Magnuson, regarding the National Science Foundation's assignment of a research vessel to Duke University. Included in the letter are four specific questions concerning the University, that I would like you to address. It is my understanding that GAO was prepared to present an oral briefing to Senator Magnuson but apparently it never took place, leaving the study uncompleted. I would like to request of you that the study be completed and that your findings are reported back to me, at the earliest possible time.

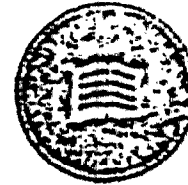
Sincerely,

  
William V. Roth, Jr.  
U. S. Senate

WVR/bcg  
Enclosure

# University of Delaware

NEWARK, DELAWARE 19711



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OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
(302) 739-2111

January 6, 1981

Dr. John B. Slaughter, Director  
National Science Foundation  
1800 G Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20550

Dear Dr. Slaughter:

As you may be aware, the University of Delaware has formally requested reconsideration of the manner in which proposals were evaluated when submitted in response to NSF 78-70 for the Construction and Operation of a Coastal Research Ship. We have followed the proceedings required by NSF notice number 84. The final step in that process is review by the Deputy Director. His response to me dated November 17, 1980 rejects our contentions. I stated in my letter to him dated November 26, 1980 that I do not find his response to be satisfactory. It is because of my continued conviction that Delaware's concerns are valid that I come to you for further consideration of this matter.

The concerns of the University of Delaware have been made known to the NSF in numerous correspondence since May 1980. These concerns have included the fact (1) that it appeared there were sufficient research vessels on the east coast to meet the oceanographic communities needs without adding two new coastal research vessels, (2) that there were no site visits conducted to evaluate the personnel and facilities offered by competing institutions, (3) that the ship support personnel and facilities at the University of Delaware far exceed those at Duke University, and (4) that Dr. Francis Johnson declined my invitation to inspect the University of Delaware and Duke University to determine first-hand the capabilities of both institutions. As background, I attach copies of all correspondence between the University of Delaware and the NSF beginning on May 5, 1980.

Page 2

Jan. 6, 1981

Dr. Slaughter

I want to be more specific about what I expect to be the consequences of the NSF decision to locate the second coastal vessel at Duke University's marine laboratory at Beaufort, North Carolina without inspecting the facilities offered by the University of Delaware at Lewes, Delaware or others. Stated simply, it is my opinion that the R.V. Eastward was not adequately maintained resulting in the need to replace it after just 16 years of service. A UNOLS study in 1978 showed that vessels of this size should have a useful life of 25 years. My personal inspection of the Duke facilities leads me to believe that a different decision would have been highly probable if objective site visits to justify capabilities had been made.

As pointed out in earlier correspondence to Dr. Johnson, the University of Delaware has spent the past ten years and several million dollars to construct outstanding coastal vessel operating facilities as well as assembling an outstanding group of support personnel. The fact that these facilities were not even inspected by the National Science Foundation prior to awarding the second coastal vessel is, in my opinion, a mishandling of public trust by the National Science Foundation.

I respectfully invite you to either personally visit these two facilities to form your own expert judgment or to convene a panel of experts to compare the capabilities available at Duke University, the University of Delaware and others.

Sincerely yours,

E. A. Trabant  
President

EAT:hl

Enclosures

cc: Dr. Samuel Lenher  
Senator William V. Roth, Jr.  
Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
Representative Thomas B. Evans, Jr.  
Governor P. S. du Pont, IV  
Dean W. S. Gaither

NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20550

**nsf**

OFFICE OF THE  
DIRECTOR

May 5, 1982


Mr. Morton A. Myers  
Director  
Program Analysis Division  
United States General Accounting Office  
Washington, D. C. 20548

Dear Mr. Myers:

I have reviewed the Draft GAO Report on Coastal Vessel Assignment. It is evident that your staff conducted a thorough investigation into that matter. I am extremely pleased to know that the actions that were taken were judged to be proper. I am also happy to know that our procedures are sound and fair. Naturally I have felt from the start that the Foundation was on firm ground in this instance, but it is heartening to have our actions vindicated in such a fashion.

I hope that you will express my appreciation to those members of the staff that performed the assessment. I certainly thank you personally as well.

Sincerely yours,

  
John B. Slaughter  
Director

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