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# Marine, coastal sciences receive financial boost

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Rep. Jim Saxton has been waiting for this for a long time.

Saxton, a legislative patron for the University's Institute of Marine and Coastal Sciences, has been trying for years to pass a large ocean science authorization package through Congress. His ultimate goal was to encourage a better understanding of the oceans as well as a better management of their resources.

The day he has been waiting for finally arrived Thursday, when Congress passed the HR 1834 bill, titled the National Ocean Exploration Program Act.

"The primary benefit of the legislation is to officially authorize these programs as a part of the federal structure and then to provide some stable long term funding," said Michael P. De Luca, the senior associate director for the Institute of Marine and Coastal Sciences. "Ultimately, we'll benefit by a better understanding of the oceans and a better management of ocean resources."

The goal of the act is to authorize the National Ocean Exploration Program Act and the National Undersea Research Program within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, according to the House bill.

The bill contains current thoughts on how the nation's ocean exploration and undersea research effort ought to be structured and presents guidelines for the funding of these programs.

"We need better information about the coastal ocean and how it functions, and how it's structured in an effort to import management of our coast and preserve water quality and habitat quality for future generations of users," De Luca said.

The NOAA is a federal agency charged with stewardship of the nation's living marine and coastal resources.

With protecting, restoring and managing the use of coastal and ocean resources and enhancing society's ability to plan and respond to climate variability as its main goals, the National Undersea Research Program works within the NOAA to provide scientists the tools and expertise they need to investigate the undersea environment.

The University managed one of six National Undersea Research Centers since 1992, called the Mid-Atlantic Bight.

"Through that program, we provide scientists with the capability to work underwater on regional and national marine science issues," De Luca said.

The National Undersea Research Program, which has existed for 30 years, has lacked funding stability, De Luca said.

"It has always been subject to the vagaries of the federal government in terms of funding, so this does provide some stable, long-term oversight for the program and funding authority," he said.

The National Ocean Exploration Program, set up in 2000, is an aspect De Luca said would warrant a need for the bill.

"[The bill] codifies this program of the federal government and enables funding to continue at a stable pace for that effort," De Luca said. "One of the key benefits is that it does provide some stability to advance exploration of the oceans and research discoveries that are found as a result of exploration."

De Luca said the University would not be the only beneficiary of the bill, but since these are national programs, many institutions will be involved in the ocean exploration and undersea research to the benefit of the nation.

The Senate passed the National Ocean Exploration Program Act's companion bill, S.39, last year. There is a difference in how funding would be distributed between the House and the Senate bill. Both chambers will have to convene a conference committee to review and solve the differences, reach a compromise and submit a common bill to the president for signature.

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