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### **Lack of federal government funding shuts *Monitor* Center lab**

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. - The Mariners' Museum is temporarily closing a 5,000-square foot lab that houses the American Civil War ironclad USS *Monitor's* gun turret and other large artifacts following the Dec. 31, 2013 expiration of an agreement with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Sanctuary Program.

"We regret having to make this decision, which is a deeply emotional one for our *Monitor* conservators, who consider themselves the guardians of these artifacts, and of their power to bring to life this important episode of American history," said Elliot Gruber, president and CEO of The Mariners' Museum.

NOAA is waiting on Congress' approval of a budget to determine what funding to make available this coming year. NOAA and The Mariners' Museum are working together to ensure that funding is in place to continue this important conservation work. The lab will re-open once funding is secured.

In 2013, the conservation cost approximately \$500,000. NOAA was only able to provide 10 percent of funding, and no funding was designated in 2012, the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Monitor's* historic clash with the Confederate ironclad *Virginia* in Hampton Roads.

"These artifacts are owned by the federal government, protected under the National Marine Sanctuaries Act and managed by the *Monitor* National Marine Sanctuary. The Museum is proud to partner with NOAA to conserve these artifacts, but their preservation is ultimately the responsibility of the federal government," Gruber said. "Over the past several years, the Museum has used its resources to make up the federal shortfall, and this has placed a tremendous strain on our budget. We are unable to properly conserve our own 35,000 artifacts, develop new exhibitions and maintain our facility as well as pay for the conservation of federally owned and managed resources."

The privately owned Mariners' Museum, founded in 1930, includes more than 90,000 square feet of exhibition space, and a 550-acre park, the largest privately maintained park free and open to the public in the United States. It is designated by Congress as America's National Maritime Museum. In 1987, Congress designated The Mariners' Museum as the official repository for artifacts recovered from the *Monitor* National Marine Sanctuary.

The federal government owns the approximately 1,500 artifacts housed in The Mariners' Museum's USS *Monitor* Center, a \$31 million, 64,000-square-foot museum expansion that opened in 2007. The artifacts were recovered from the USS *Monitor* beginning shortly after the discovery of the wreck in 1973, and culminating with the 2002 recovery of *Monitor's* iconic, 120-ton revolving gun turret. In all, over 200 tons of materials have been recovered from the site and brought to The Mariners' Museum for conservation and display. To date, the museum has successfully conserved nearly 60 percent of all *Monitor* artifacts.

The *Monitor* Center includes the award-winning exhibition *Ironclad Revolution*, as well as the 15,000-square-foot Batten Conservation Laboratory Complex. The larger of the two labs, the Wet Lab, houses *Monitor's* turret in a 90,000-gallon, custom-made tank, as well as its steam engine, Dahlgren guns and carriages, and condenser. That lab is visible to the public via large windows and a raised platform.

On March 9, 1862, the *Monitor* famously battled the CSS *Virginia* (formerly USS *Merrimack*), ushering in a new era of naval warfare. The *Monitor* sank off the coast of North Carolina on Dec. 31, 1862, with the loss of 16 American lives.