

Statement of Timothy R. Petty, Ph.D.

Nominee for Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere

Before the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

October 22, 2025

Chairman Cruz, Ranking Member Cantwell, and distinguished Members of the Committee—thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I am deeply honored to be nominated by President Trump to serve as Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere at the Department of Commerce. I also want to thank Secretary Lutnick for his confidence in me, and Senator Risch for his kind introduction and for his steadfast leadership on behalf of the people of Idaho and the nation.

It is a privilege to be here, and I respectfully ask for your consideration and consent to this nomination.

Before I begin, I'd like to take a moment to recognize my family. My wife, Elaine, is here with me today—her support has been my foundation throughout this journey. My parents and four siblings are watching remotely from the family farms back in Indiana. My mother, Esther, is 93, and my stepfather, Vernon, is 97. Their resilience, faith, and work ethic have been a guiding light in my life.

I was born and raised on a family farm in Grant County, Indiana. Our farm was more than a livelihood—it was a classroom, and a place where I learned the values that have shaped my life: hard work, faith, and service. From milking cows before sunrise, to bailing hay in the summer heat, to watching the skies for signs of rain that could make or break a season, I came to understand the deep connection between people and the land. Our farm bordered a river and a gravel pit, which sparked my early fascination with water, geology, and the natural systems that sustain us.

That curiosity led me to pursue a Bachelor of Science in Geosciences at Purdue University. I began my career in the private sector, working as a geologist and hydrogeologist in Indiana, California, and abroad. I learned the intricacies of groundwater systems, seismic activity, and the environment. But I also realized that science alone wasn't enough—we needed sound policy to guide how we manage our natural resources. That realization brought me to Washington, where I joined the Senate under Senator(s) Connie Mack, Rick Santorum, and Senator Risch.

During my time in the Senate, I've had the privilege of working with many of you and your staff. Whether it was advancing hydropower legislation, supporting tribal water rights settlements, or strengthening our water infrastructure and environment, I've seen firsthand the power of collaboration and the importance of science-based policymaking.

I later earned a Ph.D. in Water Resource Science from the University of Alaska Fairbanks. My doctoral research focused on surface hydrology and digital transformation—an area I pursued after witnessing the need for more timely and accurate flood forecasting during my time at the Interior.

At the Department of the Interior, I was honored to serve twice—first under the George W. Bush Administration, and later as Assistant Secretary for Water and Science under the Trump Administration. In these roles, I provided oversight for the U.S. Geological Survey and the Bureau of Reclamation, managing programs critical to our nation’s water security and scientific advancement.

These experiences deepened my understanding of the complex interplay between science, policy, and public service. They also reinforced my belief that effective stewardship of our oceans and atmosphere requires not only technical expertise, but collaboration, and a commitment to transparency.

Most recently, I’ve served in the House of Representatives under Chairman Sam Graves on the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, focusing on water resources and environment. This included work with the Army Corps of Engineers, the EPA, NOAA, and other key agencies whose missions are rooted in the protection and sustainable use of our water and coastal resources.

If confirmed, I will bring my full energy, experience, and dedication to advancing NOAA’s mission. I will champion innovation, transparency, and collaboration. I will listen to the voices of scientists, stakeholders, and communities. And I will work to ensure that our policies are grounded in sound science and guided by the public good.

I look forward to supporting NOAA’s dedicated workforce and advancing its critical work in oceanic research, weather forecasting, fishery monitoring, and environmental resilience. Together, we can ensure that our oceans and atmosphere are managed wisely—for today’s needs and for future generations.

Thank you again for considering my nomination. I look forward to your questions and to the opportunity to serve.