

SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

Nominations

Wednesday, July 9, 2025 at 10:00 A.M.

REPUBLICAN QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD

COVER PAGE

Neil Jacobs

SENATOR ROGER WICKER (R-MS)

1. Seafood production is a major economic driver in my state, generating hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of jobs annually. The United States only imports about 80 percent of the seafood we eat, and we have a seafood trade deficit of over \$20 billion. The U.S. can and should urgently address this seafood deficit — and that starts with producing more fresh, healthy, and sustainable seafood at home through marine aquaculture.

NOAA oversees and manages our marine fisheries and aquaculture. NOAA must lead the way in addressing the seafood trade deficit by expanding our marine aquaculture. Do you commit to leading these efforts?

Answer: The recent Executive Order on Seafood Competitiveness, building on EO 13921, directs DOC and the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) to assess seafood competitiveness issues and jointly develop a comprehensive seafood strategy, and convenes the interagency Seafood Trade Task Force co-chaired by USTR and DOC. If confirmed, I plan to use this vehicle to advance objectives to improve access to foreign markets, address unfair trade practices, and ensure a fair and competitive domestic market for U.S. seafood producers.

2. Despite its economic and strategic importance, more than 80% of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) remains unmapped at high resolution. High-tech ocean mapping, deep-sea exploration, and hydrographic surveys are essential for enhancing economic opportunities, improving national security, and ensuring maritime safety.

How do you plan to support NOAA's leadership in marine technology and expand ocean mapping, exploration, and characterization of our coastal and deep-sea resources?

Answer: In alignment with the Administration's priority of Unleashing America's Offshore Critical Minerals and Resources, if confirmed, I will ensure that NOAA continues to prioritize mapping and characterizing priority areas of the seabed, especially those with abundant offshore resources. In alignment with that Executive Order, I will coordinate with federal agencies and the private sector to accelerate data collection within the U.S. Outer Continental Shelf. Additionally, I will ensure that NOAA continues to advance hydrographic surveys in support of maritime safety and a more competitive U.S. seafood industry.

During hurricane season, Mississippi regularly utilizes NOAA's Gulf of America Coastal Ocean Observing System (GCOOS). Will you commit to maintaining and expanding NOAA's hurricane research and real-time ocean monitoring in the Gulf through the Integrated Ocean Observing System?

Answer: I am supportive of NOAA continuing to give public access to regional ocean observing data, and will prioritize the integration of available federal, academic, private sector and non-profit ocean data. I remain committed to maintaining accessibility of ocean information in support of defense, maritime navigation, commerce, public health and safety, weather

forecasting, fisheries, marine conservation and protected areas, and ocean and Great Lakes resource management.

3. Sea Grant plays a vital role in supporting our nation's coastal, Great Lakes, and ocean communities. It's especially important in Mississippi, where Sea Grant is active in supporting commercial and recreational fisheries and aquaculture to grow the blue economy. For more than 50 years, the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium has provided cost-effective, unbiased education, research, and workforce development that benefit our communities and economy.

How will you continue to support education and workforce development through the Sea Grant program?

Answer: Workforce development would be supported through NOAA's continued investments in foundational science and technology.

4. The Ocean Exploration Cooperative Institute (OECI) has and continues to support the Trump Administration's priorities through U.S. leadership in ocean exploration and technology development. The OECI is the go-to for critical minerals discovery in the ocean due their expertise with long-endurance autonomous surface and subsurface vehicles. This work is accelerated through public-private partnerships with industry.

What are your priorities for further implementation of public-private partnerships with NOAA Cooperative Institutes? How do you plan to utilize your authorities to incentivize innovative ocean research and training in the United States?

Answer: The Ocean Exploration Cooperative Institute (OECI) plays a critical role in advancing U.S. leadership in ocean exploration and technology. OECI's capabilities -- especially in long-endurance autonomous surface and subsurface vehicles -- are instrumental in accelerating the discovery of critical minerals through strong public private premierhips. If confirmed, I commit to continuing to leverage the E/V Nautilus, an OECI-affiliated vessel, to advance ocean science and support the Administration's priority of unlocking seabed mineral resources as well as identifying new opportunities to expand ocean exploration in alignment with national goals. Cooperative Institutes are an important component of NOAA's mission. My priority will be to maintain this mission by ensuring research remains focused, responsive, and tightly linked to the needs of the public.