

Testimony of

The Honorable Dr. Neil Jacobs

Before the

U.S Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, &
Transportation

March 11, 2020

Thank you, Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Cantwell, and Members of the Committee. I would also like to thank the President and Secretary Ross for their trust and confidence in me with this nomination to be the Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere. If I have the honor of being confirmed, I look forward to working with all of you on the important work performed by NOAA that benefits our country.

Currently I serve as NOAA's Assistant Secretary for Environmental Observation and Prediction, and perform the duties of Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere. I was confirmed as Assistant Secretary by the Senate in February 2018.

NOAA has a unique mission that spans from the bottoms of the ocean to the sun. Not only do we conduct cutting edge ocean and coastal research that is the best in the federal government, but we also provide lifesaving forecasts and predictions of environmental phenomena for weather, water, and climate events. Our mission impacts Americans every day. For instance, our timely and accurate weather forecasts impact not just the American economy, but also global markets. The impact of Congressional investments in our Agency are far reaching. I thank you for your continued support of our critical government mission.

Since coming to NOAA over two years ago, I have developed a deep appreciation of the dedication and professionalism of our entire workforce. They face tough challenges every day. From issuing accurate forecasts for complex weather events, managing fish stocks, mapping our coasts, and making sure satellites get launched into space, their dedication to our mission knows no bounds. If confirmed, my primary job as Administrator would be to support their ability to continue their important work.

During my time at NOAA, I have already witnessed the agency accomplish great things. In June of 2019, NOAA upgraded its weather model, the Global Forecast System (GFS). This truly was a coordinated effort across multiple line offices. From cutting edge science conducted at NOAA's research labs, to operational checks provided by the National Weather Service, this could not have been accomplished without an All-of-NOAA approach. This is the first upgrade to our dynamic core since 1980, and will power us to reclaim international leadership in numerical weather prediction in the years to come.

Likewise, NOAA is actively working to implement the recently codified and funded program, the Earth Prediction Innovation Center (EPIC). EPIC will serve as NOAA's new research-to-operations-to-research hub that will enable the scientific community to access our environmental modelling code. NOAA is working hard to set up the governance structure to then ingest improvements to our code from the scientific community, helping us improve our mission to protect lives and property. Initially starting with the Unified Forecast System, EPIC will expand to all environmental modelling capabilities at NOAA.

NOAA is also making progress on actions to protect our oceans, and increase America's seafood competitiveness by improving aquaculture activities, and supporting our Nation's fishermen. In October 2018, President Trump signed into law the "Save our Seas Act" to address the eight million tons of plastic pollution that enter the ocean each year. This Act empowers NOAA and partners to declare severe marine debris events, and release funds to states for cleanup.

Likewise in 2018, NOAA implemented \$695 million in cost-saving regulations, largely from streamlining commercial and recreational fisheries regulations to make them work better for the fishing industry and the American people, as part of the government-wide effort to reduce unnecessary and ineffective regulatory burdens under Executive Order 13771.

In 2019, NOAA took action to crack down on maritime crime and seafood import fraud. NOAA's law enforcement officers conducted an investigation into Casey's Seafood company and found that the owner purchased foreign crab meat from Asia, repackaged it and sold it as "Product of the USA" crab meat. The owner was sentenced to three years and nine months in prison and fined \$15,000.

NOAA has leveraged partnerships that advance marine science, promote new technologies and explore the unknown ocean. In 2019, NOAA awarded \$94 million over five years for the establishment of an Ocean Exploration Cooperative Institute that will explore unknown undersea areas and develop and deploy mobile remotely-operated vehicles in both deeper and shallower waters than previously explored. NOAA and partners conducted ocean exploration expeditions that resulted in the discovery of expansive and previously unknown coral habitats and discovered methane seeps in unexpected spots on the seafloor, which has significant implications for pharmaceutical development and energy resources.

It was my honor to attend and speak at the official designation of the Mallows Bay-Potomac River National Marine Sanctuary last November. It is the first National Marine Sanctuary designated in the United States in 20 years. Located a short drive from DC, Mallows Bay includes over 100 shipwrecks of national historical significance most of which were built for the war effort in Europe during World War I. The sanctuary is a great example of a partnership between NOAA, state and local governments that provides economic and conservation benefits to the local and regional communities.

Another issue I am deeply committed to is the need to fully implement and strengthen our policy to prevent sexual assault and sexual harassment (SASH) throughout the NOAA workforce. A couple weeks ago I testified before a House committee to talk about recent progress we've made on this front. But there is more to do. Enhancing our efforts to prevent SASH in the workplace

— be it on NOAA ships, on commercial fishing vessels, or in NOAA buildings — will protect the work of our scientists and managers and thus forward NOAA’s scientific mission.

If confirmed, it would be a tremendous honor to help lead such a distinguished organization of scientists, engineers, forecasters and uniformed officers. I can assure the Committee that I will do my absolute best to ensure this team of 12,000 professionals have the resources and leadership needed to produce transparent, objective and defensible science, so that decisions can be made with confidence.

Most importantly, I would like to thank my wife Jen, who is a computational biologist at Duke University, for her support and understanding, while balancing her career with raising our two sons Nicolaus and Theodore, ages 5 and 3. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Cantwell, and Members of the Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to be here. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.