

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND
TRANSPORTATION**

Full Committee

Nominations Hearing

Wednesday, October 22, 2025 at 10:30 A.M.

DEMOCRATIC QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD

Mr. Timothy Petty

COVER PAGE

SENATOR MARIA CANTWELL (D-WA)

NOAA Workforce Reductions

I have serious concerns about the current state of NOAA's workforce. Since January 2025, NOAA has lost a combined 27,000 years of experience. The resulting brain drain has impacted the entire agency. Overall, NOAA now has more than 3,000 vacant positions across the agency.

On February 19, 2025, I sent a letter to Secretary Lutnick urging him to protect NOAA's critical workforce from the Trump Administration's reduction-in-force initiatives and hiring freeze, which would jeopardize the safety of the American public. Despite this warning, NOAA has lost over 2,000 employees through probationary firings and voluntary separation programs. These staffing shortages are disrupting NOAA's core functions. For instance, over a dozen stock assessments in New England and the mid-Atlantic have been canceled this year due to staffing shortages, and additional surveys in the Gulf and Hawaii were also canceled.

Question 1: Yes or No: Do you believe NOAA can operate at its peak effectiveness when it has over 3,000 positions vacant?

Answer: If confirmed, my efforts will center on maintaining and enhancing our critical work in science, dedicated NOAA service, and effective stewardship.

Question 2: Yes or No: Do you think that the agency's ability to carry out its mission effectively has been impacted by the loss of about 2,000 officials since January?

Answer: NOAA has articulated its foundational mission and operational priorities. Upon confirmation, my focus will be on driving performance and accountability across these critical mission areas.

Question 3: Yes or No: Will you commit to fill these vacant NOAA positions under your purview without delay if confirmed?

Answer: Upon confirmation, I will take steps to ensure NOAA maintains the staffing levels required to execute its vital mission and strategic goals effectively.

Question 4: What specific steps would you take to ensure the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and National Ocean Service (NOS) has sufficient staff to conduct critical activities like stock assessments, permitting, and oil spill response?

Answer: Upon confirmation, I will immediately collaborate with NMFS, NOS, and NOAA's Human Capital Services to ensure the skilled workforce has adequate resources that are essential to advancing our fisheries and ocean mission and delivering on strategic goals.

Question 5: Will you ensure NOAA is adequately staffed so that Tribes are able to access meaningful government-to-government consultation and technical assistance on NOAA programs, including grants?

Answer: I recognize and uphold the importance of government-to-government consultations with Tribes in shaping effective and inclusive policy.

Question 6: What is your plan for rebuilding the base of expertise that has been lost, ensuring that our science remains cutting edge, and retaining experts that are otherwise likely to leave for work in other nations?

Answer: Upon confirmation, I will work to strengthen NOAA's foundation of expertise by cultivating a culture that empowers and values our researchers—enabling them to deliver innovative, high-impact science for the benefit of the American people.

National Marine Fisheries Service

American fisheries are the best managed fisheries in the world because of science. However, recent staffing cuts and the ongoing federal hiring freeze have left NOAA with a shortage of fishery managers, scientists, and mariners that NOAA needs to operate its ships.

As a result, many of NOAA's research vessels were tied up at the dock this summer, resulting in stock assessments being cancelled. Without stock assessments, NOAA will have to lower harvest levels. That means fewer fish, fewer fishing jobs, and a damaging ripple effect throughout coastal economies that rely on seafood.

Question 1: What is your plan to address stock assessment shortfalls?

Answer: If confirmed, I will collaborate with Congress to secure the resources NOAA needs to prioritize critical surveys—addressing mariner workforce gaps and expanding the use of uncrewed systems to enhance survey capabilities.

Question 2: Yes or No: Do you support moving NMFS, the Office of Protected Resources, or any of their activities and functions out of NOAA? If yes, explain why.

Answer: The FY 2026 President's Budget request for NOAA proposes transferring responsibilities under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) from the National Marine Fisheries Service's Office of Protected Resources to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service within the Department of the Interior. This shift aims to enhance interagency coordination, increase operational efficiency, and streamline the implementation of these laws—ultimately reducing regulatory burdens for both the public and industry.

Northwest Fisheries Science Center

A significant portion of salmon research occurs at the Northwest Fisheries Science Center in Seattle. That building is in dire need of replacement. I previously secured funding for a new building that could be collocated with the University of Washington, but it was rescinded by the reconciliation bill.

Question 1: Do you support replacing the Northwest lab facility?

Answer: NOAA's infrastructure, including the Northwest Fisheries Science Center, is central to advancing scientific research and conservation goals. These facilities contribute directly to the recovery of Pacific salmon and steelhead—species that are integral to the Pacific Northwest's

economy, cultural identity, and Tribal Treaty obligations. Strategic investment in these assets is important but must be guided by practical and sustainable planning. If confirmed, I will work closely with Congress, GSA, and local partners to explore appropriate next steps for the Northwest Fisheries Science Center.

Salmon Infrastructure

Salmon are central to the state of Washington's economy, culture, Tribal Treaty Rights, and our identity in the Pacific Northwest. We need a refined strategy with bold actions that restores critical habitats and advances innovative science to turn the tide on salmon declines so that we can make meaningful progress on salmon restoration.

Question 1: Do you support including salmon infrastructure, such as funding for hatcheries and culvert removal, in future infrastructure and surface transportation packages?

Answer: The health of Northwest salmon populations depends on effective management of infrastructure and tributary systems. NOAA views these elements as critical and will continue to collaborate closely with regional stakeholders to ensure sustainable fisheries for future generations.

Question 2: If confirmed, will you work with me to solve problems that harm salmon populations such as culverts and hazardous tire chemicals?

Answer: The health of salmon populations in the region depends heavily on the condition of infrastructure and water quality systems. While transportation management, water quality resources and chemical oversight fall outside NOAA's direct authority, the agency is dedicated to working in partnership with state, local, and federal entities to ensure these critical resources are managed effectively for the enduring viability of salmon.

Question 3: Yes or No: Do you support further investments in Tribal salmon hatchery infrastructure?

Answer: I recognize the deep connection between Tribes and fisheries resources, and if confirmed, I will work to maintain strong, enduring partnerships with Tribal governments to address fisheries management challenges together.

Bipartisan NOAA Programs

I along with Senator Wicker have introduced bills to reauthorize both the Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS) and National Sea Grant College programs, which would be eliminated in the President's FY 2026 budget. NOAA's buoy provides access to high quality ocean, coastal and Great Lakes data that weather forecasters, fishermen, marine transportation, and other ocean users depend on for safety and to support coastal economic development. And Sea Grant helps protect coastal communities while supporting our fishermen. Last year, Washington Sea Grant generated over \$60 million in economic benefits to the State of Washington, nearly 20 times the federal investment.

Question 1: Do you support the IOOS program?

Answer: I support NOAA's efforts to keep regional ocean observing data publicly accessible. I will champion the integration of ocean data from diverse sources—including federal agencies, universities, industry, and non-profits—to strengthen our collective understanding. Continued access to this data is vital for supporting defense operations, safe maritime navigation, economic activity, public health, weather prediction, fisheries, conservation, and the responsible management of ocean and Great Lakes ecosystems.

Question 2: Do you support the Sea Grant program?

Answer: The President's 2026 budget request provides a clear framework for prioritizing federal expenditures.

Question 3: Do you commit to maintaining programs within NOAA that are Congressionally mandated?

Answer: If confirmed, I will faithfully follow the law and remain committed to advancing NOAA's essential work—from ocean and marine stewardship, fisheries management and to weather forecasting—with scientific rigor, transparency, and impact effectiveness.

Fisheries Disasters

An important role of NOAA Fisheries is to administer disaster assistance funds for declared fisheries disasters. U.S. fishermen are currently waiting on \$300 million in appropriated funds for fisheries disasters assistance to be administered.

Question 1: Do you commit to ensuring NOAA Fisheries quickly administers appropriated fisheries disaster assistance funds once confirmed?

Answer: I recognize the critical importance of NOAA's management of fisheries disaster assistance, which provides support to coastal economies and fishing communities following catastrophic events. If confirmed, I commit to working closely with the Department to administer assistance funds without unnecessary disruption.

Question 2: What steps will you take to ensure fisheries disaster funds are administered without delay in the future?

Answer: If confirmed, I commit to working with the resources that Congress provides, and to working with the Department and OMB to prioritize streamlining the disbursement process to deliver these critical funds to the impacted states, tribes, and territories.

Illegal, Unregulated, and Unreported (IUU) Fishing

IUU fishing is a key driver of global overfishing that threatens marine ecosystems, food security, and regional stability. It's a major global challenge that requires a whole-of-government approach by US agencies for effective data collection, sharing of information, and enforcement efforts. The recent Executive Order 14276 on seafood competitiveness emphasized the urgency

of protecting U.S. markets and maritime security from threats posed by IUU fishing and those products entering U.S. supply chains. It explicitly calls for enhanced federal efforts to counter IUU fishing, improve traceability of seafood products, and coordinate more effectively across agencies, including Customs and Border Protection, Coast Guard, and the State Department. Given the scale of the threat and the vulnerabilities in U.S. seafood supply chains, this EO represents an opportunity and responsibility for NOAA to lead and act quickly.

Question 1: What actions will you take to ensure NOAA's efforts to address IUU fishing is prioritized and sufficiently resourced?

Answer: Ensuring the competitiveness of American seafood means confronting IUU fishing head-on. If confirmed, I will support NOAA's efforts to enhance enforcement, expand monitoring of seafood imports, and build stronger global coalitions to prevent illegally caught fish from entering the U.S. supply chain.

Question 2: What actions will you take to improve coordination between NOAA and other agencies and ensure a whole-of-government approach to combating IUU fishing?

Answer: The Executive Order on Seafood Competitiveness, expanding upon EO 13921, calls on DOC and USTR to evaluate seafood trade dynamics and develop a unified strategy, while establishing the Seafood Trade Task Force under joint leadership. If confirmed, I will actively engage this mechanism to pursue improved market access, combat unfair trade practices, and ensure a level playing field for American seafood producers.

SENATOR ED MARKEY (D-MA)

1. Sound, unbiased ocean and atmospheric research is at the heart of the component of NOAA you would supervise if confirmed. Do you agree with the scientific communities' consensus that climate change is real and already impacting the ocean including American fisheries?
 - a. Do you believe that it is NOAA's responsibility to conduct research and educate the public about all aspects of our changing climate and how it will impact their daily lives?

Answer: I believe NOAA has a vital responsibility to conduct rigorous applied research and to communicate its findings with transparency and clarity. It is essential that the public understands how changes in our oceans and atmosphere influence daily life—from weather systems and coastal resilience to food supply and public safety.

- b. If confirmed, how will you ensure that NOAA leads the way in developing and implementing climate-ready fisheries policies — supporting adaptive management, advancing ocean and climate science, and strengthening the resilience of U.S. fishermen and coastal communities facing these accelerating environmental changes?

Answer: If confirmed, I will ensure NOAA leads with science-based, adaptive fisheries policies that respond to changing environmental and economic conditions. I will prioritize investments in ocean science, fishery surveys and strengthen data-driven management, while working closely with fishermen, stakeholders, states, Tribal partners, and coastal communities to build resilience in the face of international competition, IUU impacts and environmental change.

2. NOAA has lost significant portions of its workforce since this administration has begun, hampering its ability to operate. Do you commit to advocating for and protecting the remaining staff at NOAA from further reductions in force in order to successfully oversee the operations of the National Marine Fisheries Service, National Ocean Service, and other agency components under your supervision?

Answer: If confirmed, I will work closely with NOAA's line offices, including the National Marine Fisheries Service and National Ocean Service, and coordinate with the Office of Human Capital Services to ensure we have the best workforce to deliver on our mission and advance strategic goals and priorities across the agency.

3. During your nomination hearing you stated that you believe artificial intelligence (AI) will be critical to addressing issues managing our fisheries. Yet fisheries management

will not be possible without adequate staff as AI cannot replace many of the critical staff roles currently vacant due to ongoing reductions in force. Please list at least three ways you plan to remediate the staffing issues at the National Marine Fisheries Service caused by the reductions in force, voluntary resignation program, and overall attrition (i.e. retirements and early departures).

Answer: If confirmed, I will work to strengthen staffing at the National Marine Fisheries Service. First, by reinforcing foundational roles in research and applied science, build law enforcement measures, and stakeholder engagement that are central to NOAA's fisheries mission. Second, by investing in people by improving retention strategies, supporting professional development, and fostering a culture of excellence. Third, using AI as a tool—not a substitute—to support staff, streamline operations, and free up human capacity for priority mission areas and collaboration.

4. You also stated during your nomination hearing that you understand the dangers posed by algal blooms to our water quality, public health, and environmental health. If confirmed, will you commit to supporting career scientists' unbiased assessments of all of the contributing factors to harmful algal blooms, including from agriculture?

Answer: If confirmed, I will uphold NOAA's commitment to scientific transparency and integrity. Supporting career scientists in evaluating drivers harmful to fisheries and oceans underpin the economic drivers for a robust fishery population.

- a. Will you commit to supporting the recommendations made by career NOAA scientists to address harmful algal blooms even if they come into conflict with Department of Agriculture priorities?

Answer: If confirmed, I will guide NOAA with the understanding that transparency, rigorous science, and open communication are essential to earning public trust and advancing our core science mission.

SENATOR TAMMY DUCKWORTH (D-IL)

Federal Elections

1. Setting aside the Congressional count and certification, do you believe President Donald Trump received more votes than Vice President Kamala Harris in the 2024 U.S. presidential election?

Answer: After securing certification through the constitutional process, President Donald Trump assumed office as the 47th President of the United States on January 20, 2025.

2. Setting aside the official Congressional count and certification, do you believe President Joe Biden received more votes than President Donald Trump in the 2020 U.S. presidential election?

Answer: After securing certification through the constitutional process, former President Joseph Biden assumed office as the 46th President of the United States on January 20, 2021.

SENATOR JOHN HICKENLOOPER (D-CO)

Colorado River Basin Forecast Center

The Colorado River is the hardest working river in the West. It supplies water to 40 million people across 7 states while supporting farms, communities, and economies. Given the climate-induced drought over the last 25 years, it is critical to closely track the river's supply.

NOAA plays a vital role in collecting and sharing timely information to communities about forecasts—including through the Colorado River Basin Forecast Center, which examines reservoir inflows, streamflow forecasts, and provides flash flood guidance.

1. Dr. Petty, if confirmed, how will you ensure the Colorado River Basin Forecast Center continues and expands its critical water security mission?

Answer: If confirmed, I will ensure that NOAA's foundational missions—including collaborative research in the Colorado River Basin—remain resilient and effective, upholding scientific rigor and interagency cooperation through any structural or administrative changes.

NOAA's Facilities and Cooperative Institutes

NOAA's presence in Boulder stretches back over 25 years. NOAA's collaborations across the scientific community in Boulder extend to Colorado's NIST campus, NSF National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR), and two Cooperative Institutes supported by NOAA: the Cooperative Institute for Research in the Atmosphere (CIRA); and Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences (CIRES).

Dr. Petty, in our conversation, you shared with me your desire to preserve and expand public access to NOAA's key datasets.

1. Dr. Petty, if confirmed, will you commit to preserving the integrity of NOAA's essential research functions and Cooperative Institute partnerships?

Answer: If confirmed, I will lead NOAA with a commitment to continuity and excellence in its core missions—from weather forecasting to fisheries oversight—ensuring they remain effective and scientifically sound. I will prioritize research that is focused, agile, and responsive to the evolving needs of communities across the nation.

Western Water

The United States should always strive to represent the global gold standard for weather forecasting and modeling. Emerging technologies such as quantum computing and artificial intelligence are transforming every sector of our economy. Dr. Petty, in our conversation, you

shared with me how you would like to help NOAA leverage emerging technologies like AI and quantum to help address major issues such as drought.

1. Dr. Petty, how would you ensure NOAA's climate and hydrological data, forecasts, and modeling capabilities are effectively deployed to help Western states better manage water resources under worsening drought and aridification?

Answer: If confirmed, I will ensure NOAA's hydrological expertise is deployed with transparency and open science modeling to support Western states and Tribal communities facing water stress and demand. I will champion open data access, support co-developed solutions with local stakeholders, and maintain scientific rigor in all modeling and forecasting efforts to guide sustainable water resource decisions.

2. Dr. Petty, how would you strengthen NOAA's collaboration with state, local, and tribal governments in inland regions—including farmers, ranchers, and outdoor recreationists—to expand access to actionable data?

Answer: If confirmed, I will strengthen NOAA's inland partnerships by using regional engagement through listening sessions and stakeholder roundtables, ensuring that farmers, ranchers, and outdoor recreationists have a direct voice in shaping NOAA's data priorities. I will work to improve the accessibility of NOAA's hydrological tools and models, allowing local communities to tailor them to meet the operational needs of inland communities. Additionally, I will support Tribal and local partnerships to co-develop their own data products that reflect regional priorities, ensuring that NOAA's science is both responsive and inclusive.

Wildfire Preparedness

The Mountain West is increasingly threatened by devastating wildfires. NOAA and the National Weather Service play a key role in helping forecast, model, and identify areas prone to wildfires.

Earlier this week, on Tuesday, October 21st, we were proud to advance the bipartisan Fix Our Forests Act in the Senate Committee on Agriculture, to help increase our preparedness against wildfires.

1. Dr. Petty, how will you ensure NOAA's weather and climate forecasting tools—particularly those related to precipitation and fire weather—are *improved* and *communicated* in ways that help state and local officials plan for and mitigate these extreme events?

Answer: If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and your staff to advance fire weather forecasting. As new technologies, observations, and data become available, I will work with the NOAA Administrator and Assistant Secretary for Environmental Observations and Prediction to ensure NOAA advances forecasting in the area of fire weather.