

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

Full Committee

Nominations Hearing

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

REPUBLICAN QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD

Mr. Timothy Petty

COVER PAGE

SENATOR ROGER WICKER (R-MS)

Aquaculture

Background: Seafood production is a cornerstone of Mississippi's coastal economy — supporting thousands of jobs and contributing hundreds of millions of dollars each year through our commercial fisheries, processors, and seafood markets. Yet nationwide, the United States continues to import roughly 80 percent of the seafood we consume, resulting in a seafood trade deficit that now exceeds \$20 billion annually. I see that as a missed opportunity for American workers and coastal communities. NOAA must play a central role in closing that gap. Expanding marine aquaculture will help ensure that more of the seafood on American plates is produced by American hands.

1. If confirmed, will you commit to prioritizing the growth of U.S. marine aquaculture as part of NOAA's broader strategy to reduce our seafood trade deficit and support coastal economies like those in Mississippi?

Answer: A central tenet of the Administration's agenda is the advancement of American marine aquaculture. The President's Executive Order, "Restoring America's Seafood Competitiveness," included provisions for streamlining aquaculture permitting, a commitment NOAA is actively pursuing. NOAA intends to continue working with the various regulatory agencies to streamline permitting for greater efficiency and predictability, while continuing to advance aquaculture research and promote sustainable practices.

Ocean Observations and Technology

Background: The Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS) is the nation's leading resource for community-driven coastal, ocean, and Great Lakes sensor information. This vital program supports a vast network of buoys, gliders, high frequency radars, and other sensors that monitor U.S. waters. IOOS deploys, operates, and maintains more than 300 observing assets at 11 Regional Associations. Mississippi's Gulf Coast is home to national leaders in ocean observing and research, including the University of Southern Mississippi, the Stennis Space Center, and the Gulf Coastal Ocean Observing System.

1. As NOAA's Deputy Administrator, how would you ensure IOOS data and research are fully applied to improve coastal management, strengthen forecasting, and support local industries across the Gulf region?

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.

2. The Gulf Coast is also expanding as a center for marine technology and innovation, from autonomous systems and advanced sensors to new data tools that support weather and ocean forecasting. Do you agree that NOAA should continue to partner with universities, small businesses, and private industry to expand economic opportunities and strengthen America's leadership in ocean technology?

Answer: Yes, I support NOAA's continued engagement with universities, small businesses, and the private sector to expand economic opportunities and technological leadership. Strategic partnerships are key to advancing NOAA's mission while also supporting regional economies, especially along the Gulf Coast. By leveraging external expertise and innovation, NOAA can enhance its science-based modeling, forecasting capabilities, improve fishery monitoring, and support a thriving blue economy.

NOAA Cooperative Institutes

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

1. 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: If confirmed, I will focus on strengthening NOAA's partnerships with universities, Tribal nations, states, private sector and industry to ensure that ocean research and workforce development reflects the regional and local communities. I will work to broaden access to NOAA's scientific resources, support collaborative projects in emerging marine and fishery technologies, and champion training pathways that prepare the next generation of ocean leaders.

SENATOR DAN SULLIVAN (R-AK)

Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness

- Alaska alone supplies more than half of the seafood produced in the entire United States, and it is integral to our way of life.
- Over the last several years, the U.S. seafood industry has experienced significant economic hardship and drastic declines, primarily due to unfair and predatory practices from Russia and China.
- In April, President Trump gave fishermen a shot in the arm with his Executive order for *Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness*. We are so thankful to the President for putting forward such a meaningful EO to help our fishermen.
- This EO provides a roadmap to restore the U.S. domestic fishing industry to greatness.
- This EO provides several direct pathways to further support our Alaska fishermen and our communities, including strategies to promote marketing, sale, and export of US seafood products.
 - I look forward to working with you, NOAA Administrator Neil Jacobs, Secretary Lutnick, and all of the other agency heads tasked with ushering in a new Era of Seafood Policy under this Executive Order. I ask that you use me and my office as a resource as we move forward on these efforts.
- Alaska is the superpower of seafood, supporting 1.6 million jobs nationwide and providing 10 billion meals each year.
- More than \$1.7 billion in Alaska seafood products are exported annually, contributing \$15.8 billion to the US economy.
- But, to accomplish all of this, U.S. fishermen need a few basic things from the federal government:
 - Robust and timely fish surveys to inform accurate science-based stock assessments; and
 - Timely promulgation of regulations to manage—and open—the fisheries.
- Unfortunately, NOAA's fisheries surveys and stock assessments are increasingly challenged by aging survey vessels, data gaps, and delayed reporting, which can lead to managers being overly cautious and reduce the amount of fish that can be caught.
- This means less money in our American fishermen's pockets and fewer opportunities for our people to have prime wild-caught fish—this is real economic harm for Alaska's and America's fishing communities.

- We are the gold standard for sustainable management.
 - However, if we want to stay competitive and close the seafood trade gap while keeping U.S. fisheries the most sustainable in the world, NOAA has to modernize its science, its surveys, and its technology.
 - That means better data collection, faster processing, and tools that can give fishermen and managers real-time insights.
 - A strong NOAA and National Marine Fisheries Service—along with a dedicated, professional workforce—is also critical to generating this economic activity and furthering the goals of the President’s EO.
 - There is a reason these surveys must take place, and we need to make sure that NOAA’s fisheries science centers conduct this work not just this year, but in future years.
1. Dr. Petty, will you commit to prioritizing the modernization of NOAA’s fisheries science, including improved survey capacity, data collection, and technology upgrades, so that Alaska’s fishermen and coastal communities can continue to rely on the best science in the world to sustain their livelihoods and our nation’s seafood supply?

Answer: Yes.

2. Dr. Petty, I mentioned the EO on Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness, and how it includes seafood marketing, yet NOAA has zeroed out the Saltonstall-Kennedy grant program in FY25 and have not yet allocated money for FY26. Can you commit to ensuring there is funding for the Saltonstall-Kennedy FY26 grant program?

Answer: If confirmed, I commit to keeping you informed regarding the implementation of the President’s Executive Order on Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness. I also look forward to staying in touch as the Administration develops the FY2027 President’s Budget request to Congress.

IUU Fishing

- Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated or “IUU” fishing poses a significant threat to global marine ecosystems, economies, and food security. It’s estimated that IUU fishing accounts for up to 20% of the global catch, which translates to global losses between \$10 billion and \$50 billion annually.
- IUU fishing is generally not an issue in the United States; our fisheries are the most sustainable in the world. But sustainably-sourced, legally-caught, high-quality seafood can’t compete with illegally sourced seafood that is being plundered from our oceans.

- We cannot have IUU fishing continue to threaten the livelihoods of U.S. fishermen, undermine fair competition, and deplete global fish stocks. Despite existing enforcement mechanisms, illegal operators continue to exploit loopholes and evade oversight, often engaging in forced labor and environmentally destructive practices.
 - Because of these threats to U.S. industry, I introduced the Fighting Foreign Illegal Seafood Harvest (FISH) Act, which combats IUU fishing globally. The FISH Act is a very bipartisan bill and is just passed the Senate as an amendment to the FY 26 NDAA.
1. Dr. Petty, can you commit to strengthening enforcement against IUU fishing and ensuring that American fishermen are competing on a level playing field?

Answer: Under the new Seafood Competitiveness directive, DOC and USTR are charged with developing a coordinated strategy to enhance the vitality of the U.S. seafood sector, including through the Seafood Trade Task Force. If confirmed, I will leverage this initiative to improve access to foreign markets, confront unfair trade practices, and reinforce a fair and thriving domestic marketplace for American seafood producers through strong interagency and industry collaboration.

NOAA Ocean Data / Research

- Dr. Petty, western Alaska is still recovering from the devastation caused by the remnants of Typhoon Halong, which brought destructive winds and record storm surges that displaced families and destroyed homes across Western Alaska.
- Events like that remind us just how much is at stake for Alaska's coastal communities — and how essential NOAA's research and observing systems are for protecting lives and livelihoods.
- Alaskans know better than most that accurate, long-term forecasting can mean the difference between safety and catastrophe.
- In addition to ensuring the safety of our coastal communities, ocean data and research are critical drivers for supporting our nation's economy, and I commend this Administration for its focus on unleashing technology and innovation.
- Alaskans know firsthand how important our coasts and oceans are, several spending much of the year out on the water or harvesting along our coasts.
- However, to fully unleash Alaska's economic potential and allow our communities to thrive, Alaska needs the tools and weather forecasts to improve safety, enhance the economy, and protect the environment for our coastal communities.

- For this reason, I cosponsored a bill with my colleague Senator Wicker to reauthorize the Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS) at NOAA.
 - The goals of IOOS decrease risks for Alaska. With better, faster, and more cost-effective technologies and essential data we can unlock our economic potential and protect lives and livelihoods.
1. Will you commit to empowering NOAA's ocean data and research functions to ensure that Alaska doesn't lose the scientific capacity for important operational and long-term forecasting?

Answer: Yes.

Alaska Salmon Research Task Force

- I now want to turn to what is truly the lifeblood of my state: salmon.
 - Salmon is a way of life in Alaska and a primary food source for many in the state. We don't buy our salmon in the store like you all do, we fish for it, and we put it up to eat throughout the year. Salmon closures shake the foundation of our daily lives.
 - Over the last several years, we have seen huge disparities in our salmon runs. Bristol Bay has had fantastic Sockeye returns, while the Yukon and Kuskokwim are seeing abysmal returns of King salmon and seasons continue to be closed.
 - It is imperative that we get to the bottom of what is causing these fluctuations and poor salmon returns.
 - Luckily, you've got a basis to work on. My Alaska Salmon Research Task Force Act was signed into law in 2022 and had NOAA collaborate with salmon experts in Alaska to chart a path forward to research why we are seeing such decreased abundance of salmon.
 - The report was released last summer with suggestions of discrete, meaningful research projects that we can undertake to get to the bottom of this issue.
 - A major research gap that was identified was that we are doing very little research on the middle of salmon's lives when they are in the ocean. That research is crucial to understanding how to ensure sustainable salmon runs.
1. Can you commit to working with me to prioritize and build upon the work we have started to better understand why our salmon runs are decreasing in Alaska?

Answer: Yes.

Russian Seafood Reciprocity Executive Orders

- Dr. Petty, I want to bring up something that we talked about during our meeting and that is the current reciprocal ban on Russian Seafood.
 - Russia has banned U.S. seafood from its markets since 2014. However, for many years, Russia was not subject to any special import duties in the U.S. Meanwhile, Russia has drastically increased seafood production since 2022 and is openly working to flood both U.S. and global markets with cheap seafood to push out U.S. product.
 - All the while, our hardworking fishermen could not export a single fish to Russia. For nearly 10 years we allowed them to do this and for years, I advocated to address this asymmetrical and very unfair trade relationship. I was finally successful in getting the last Administration to roll out a couple of executive orders to put a stop to this and restore reciprocity. If we can't enter the Russian market, they shouldn't be able to flood ours, too.
 - EO 14068 in 2022 banned imports of Russian seafood. However, Russia found a loophole by laundering their seafood through China to circumvent the ban. EO 14114 in 2023 closed this loophole and made it abundantly clear that any seafood harvested in Russia is banned from import into the U.S.—even if it goes through processing in another country.
 - Russia is our biggest competitor in a lot of the seafood market, and just like China, they don't play fair.
1. Will you commit to working with Secretary Lutnick to keep these reciprocal executive orders—EO 14068 and EO 14114—in place? They are critical to keeping our seafood trade fair.

Answer: If confirmed, I will collaborate with both Secretary Lutnick, Under Secretary Jacobs, and other stakeholders to ensure these executive orders are implemented effectively and reflect the President's priorities. I will also advocate for data-driven assessments and stakeholder engagement to keep our seafood trade policies aligned with industry needs and global standards.

SENATOR MARSHA BLACKBURN (R-TN)

1. Last year, at the urging of Chairman Cruz and myself, NOAA issued a two-year pause on new permitting restrictions for undersea cables. This pause was a step in the right direction, but it's only temporary. That's why I recently introduced the Undersea Cable Protection Act, which would make that pause permanent and ensure NOAA cannot impose burdensome regulations that unnecessarily slow down the deployment of critical subsea cable infrastructure. Given the importance of undersea cables to our national security, global communications, and economic competitiveness, do you agree that we need to eliminate burdensome regulations at NOAA and streamline permitting so these projects can continue without delay?

Answer: The vital importance of undersea cables for national security and economic competitiveness is fully acknowledged. The agency's core responsibility is to ensure that its regulatory processes are efficient and appropriately streamlined for the deployment of this critical infrastructure. If confirmed, I commit to prioritizing the review and efforts to streamline processes related to permitting and address any unnecessary administrative burdens.

2. Mr. Petty, many industries rely on publicly available NOAA datasets for the purpose of not only assessing and protecting against immediate weather risks, but also for historical knowledge that influences long-term infrastructure planning. NOAA's data and cutting-edge research helps all taxpayers better understand what risks weather poses to their communities and properties, and it affects how we act before and after some of our country's biggest emergencies. In your view, what is NOAA's proper role in making their data available to the public?

Answer: NOAA's role in public data access is central to its mission. By providing open, high-quality datasets, NOAA empowers communities, industries, and governments to prepare for weather extremes, design resilient infrastructure, and respond effectively to emergencies. If confirmed, I will work to strengthen data delivery systems, improve user interfaces, and deliver science-based datasets to ensure NOAA's science reaches those who need it most.