

**U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell**

**Nomination Hearing**

**July 9, 2025**

**Sen. Cantwell Opening Remarks**

**[\[VIDEO\]](#)**

**Sen. Cantwell:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and as you mentioned, this hearing comes at an incredible time of human loss from the floods in Texas, and now we know in New Mexico and North Carolina. But I want to offer my condolences to the families who have lost loved ones in this unimaginable tragedy, and to the people of Texas. We grieve along with you as a nation.

Our thoughts and prayers do go to the families, to ask for strength for them to deal with this incredible loss. And as you said, there is a time and a place to figure out what transpired. You know, for us in the Northwest, where natural disasters, whether it's fire, flooding, earthquakes or the "big one" that is someday going to hit, this issue of first responders and communication is really important to us, too.

So, I too, want to thank the National Guard for their incredible work and response to this incident. I want to thank the Coast Guard men and women. [I'm] pretty sure we train...surfmens out on the Olympic...Long Beach area of our state, and we're very proud of what they do to get those men and women ready to help do the search and rescue.

But clearly, first responders did everything that they were asked to do in response to this flood. But as you said, Mr. Chairman, there will be others. So, I agree that we should figure out what we can do in the future, to improve our communication system, to improve the science behind the information and to figure out how we best prepare for the future.

Today, we're considering Dr. Jacobs to be the NOAA Administrator, Mr. Taylor to be the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Environmental Observation Protection, and Mr. Kumar to be the Assistant Secretary.

NOAA does play an incredible important role in preserving life and property, and obviously good data behind your weather reporting for sustainable fisheries to get food on the table [and] to support our domestic product. You play a critical role in safety and economic competitiveness, and so obviously, I'm going to ask today about the cuts to NOAA, and how, as a science agency, you preserve the core mission of an agency when we're cutting so much of the science and the science budget.

The [Administration's proposed] budget eliminates the office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research, [NOAA'S] R&D arm, which is critical to improving lead times and accuracy of information. NOAA's R&D is at the cutting edge of science and projects like Warn-on-Forecast, which will give communities more notice about tornadoes and other severe weather events by using prediction models instead of waiting to detect weather...that is already occurring.

The budget proposal also eliminates NOAA's Integrated Ocean Observing System Program, the buoy system. This is a very bipartisan program that helps us, particularly in the Northwest, in

detecting the potential of tsunamis, hurricane forecasts, fisheries, [and] marine transportation. And even though the Administration put out an Executive Order calling for growing American fisheries, I believe that we are doing the opposite if we're not investing in the kind of stock assessments that we need to deal with fisheries management.

So, while the Administration seeks to slash NOAA's budget, it has also taken a sledgehammer to its workforce. Since the start of the year, NOAA's workforce has been gutted by 2,000 employees. The agency currently has over 3,000 vacant positions, most of which cannot be filled due to the hiring freeze.

For example, Pendleton, Oregon, the forecast office serving Central Washington, no longer has 24/7 local coverage because of their 44 percent vacancy rate. And in my opinion, that is unacceptable in the height of fire season. The hiring freeze also resulted in [180] vacancies at NOAA's research ships, resulting in 30 percent of those ships being left at the docks this summer, instead of charting navigation in the Arctic, servicing key weather buoys and conducting stock assessments.

So, for Washington, two pollock stock assessment surveys and one salmon survey have already been canceled. Now, what this means is that people can't fish. We don't have the science -- they can't fish. We're putting billions of dollars of economic activity at risk.

So, the West Coast region of NOAA Fisheries has lost so many staff that we no longer have key experts to negotiate salmon or other treaties, and entire permitting teams are gone, and local communities are begging for answers on these [issues].

So, I expect to hear how we're going to defend the science mission without the people and without the science to help deliver those essential services. I want to know what our real plan is and that we're going to continue to protect our environment.

Mr. Jordan, if confirmed, you will be responsible for advising the administrator on weather, water, climate and related matters, and I hope that you will tell us today how you also plan to counter cuts to the weather program, and where you stand on the R&D investment that we need to improve forecasts such as supercomputing.

Climate change is driving more intense hurricanes, more frequent severe atmospheric rivers, rain events, and is doubling the number of wildfires. According to NOAA, since 1980 we've had, on average, nine extreme weather events annually that have cost us over \$1 billion each. So, from 1980, nine extreme events, but in the last five years, that has spiked to 23 events per year, and last year it was 27 events.

So, we can see that we're having more devastating impact and the cost to all of us. So, we're in a state of emergency that's getting worse, and we need to come up with better solutions. So, we know how to do this. In 2015, as firefighters were fighting a devastating wildfire in Okanogan County, and wind patterns changed, resulting in the loss of firefighters, we implemented new tools to help with the training of a new system that would help us get better information and get that information faster.

I should also note that today, the OIG for the Department of Commerce, Office of Inspector General, released a report on our National Weather Service tornado forecasting system and the

things that they believe the office has gotten wrong in forecasting, the shortcomings of that system, and six plans for improvement, and so we'll probably ask you about that as well.

So finally, Mr. Kumar, you'd be leading the Legislative Affairs Department. Simply put, the Department's critical engagement with members of this Committee is not happening at the level we need it to happen. So I expect you will help fundamentally change that, if confirmed, and make sure that as Members ask for information and data from the Agency, that they will receive it in a timely manner.

So thank you, Mr. Chairman, and again, our hearts are with you, your colleague, Senator Cornyn, the many people of Texas, and we will work with you in whatever fashion we can to help move forward and help Texans in any way. And obviously our colleagues here on the Committee from New Mexico and our colleagues in the larger body from North Carolina, but thank you so much.

## **U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell**

### **Nomination Hearing**

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### **Sen. Cantwell First Q&A**

#### **[\[VIDEO\]](#)**

**Sen. Cantwell:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Following up a little bit on your line of questioning, since you approached this. Certainly, Dr Jacobs, as I mentioned in my opening statement, I'm concerned about 27 percent budget cuts and particularly the Oceanic and Atmospheric Research organization itself and the people.

But to get this right, following on Senator Cruz's questioning. You know, we had a less tragic event, but no less tragic event out on the Olympic Peninsula. The NOAA Weather Service said, "No, you don't need a Doppler." And we're like, "Yes, we do, because we have a mountain range that is blocking the information." NOAA Weather Service said, "No, you don't." And we said, "Yes, we do." And then we had 100-year event that killed people and did unbelievable damage. And all of a sudden, NOAA weather forecaster said, "Yep, we're gonna help you." Actually, we helped get the Doppler.

Now we still have a community that we have information. But guess what? Every day we live there, within threat of a tsunami, and we've built a tower, but that's it. There is no real coordination with that community. I mean, the bottom line here is we have beautiful places around the United States of America, and people want to go visit them and live there, and they do. But guess what? They are not the most resourced communities in our country.

Then the question becomes, what do we do to provide the emergency response, whether it is fire or hurricane or tsunami, you know, or tornado, what do we do? Now, you mentioned the radio, and I want to get to that communication level. But I want to start with just the basic research. Because at that same event, when we got the Doppler and we got the tower, I said, "So now we're done, right?" And they're like, "No, we're not done." I said, "Well, why is that?" They said, "Senator, because every particle in a storm is its own algorithm, and we could be computing this,

and we could tell you two weeks in advance what the storm is likely to do, if we put in the supercomputing time.”

So, I have no idea why in heck our nation lets the European model get ahead of us. I have no idea why we do this, when all we need to do is use Senator Blackburn’s supercomputing time at their national lab and put the resources behind it. So, let's start with that. Should we be putting more resources into supercomputing time so we can predict storms further out?

**Dr. Jacobs:** Well, obviously, high performance supercomputers, these physics-based algorithms, need a lot of it, and one of the priorities of mine is advancing numerical weather prediction. But the reason why that, one of the one of the reasons why the American model was lagging the European model, was not just lack of compute, but the code wasn't architected to run on certain computers.

**Sen. Cantwell:** We're [not] going to let somebody else...I'm not letting somebody else out-code us. Okay, trust me, coming from Seattle, I'm not letting, this is all doable...

**Dr. Jacobs:** Oh, I agree.

**Sen. Cantwell:** ...it's about whether we have the resources and the investment. And I'm saying, let's make the investment. And you agree? Is what I'm trying to get at.

**Dr. Jacobs:** I agree.

**Sen. Cantwell:** You agree. Let's put the investment into this.

**Dr. Jacobs:** High performance computing. Cloud-based high performance computing is critically important. Another thing I'd like to point out is, once we transition that code to architectures that even industry could run, now we have private industry investing and developing the same code.

**Sen. Cantwell:** Okay, look, I'm all I'm all for that, but I want you to maintain your role. And I think that the difference here is -- and we and we do that, believe it or not, the University of Washington has probably helped this community plan for an eventual tsunami more than anybody has because they've outlined [plans]-- so it comes to the second point, which I just want to drill down on, because we're having this problem now with not having these forecasters.

The fire situation I mentioned, we woke up one day and...the meteorologist from NOAA said, “Oh, I'm over in Seattle.” And this...here's a totally different picture. Central Washington, because they didn't have a meteorologist in that region on the ground, predicted something else and sent people out. Sent people out and they died. Because the fire was too volatile, given the high winds.

So, we've been a big believer in having that local meteorologist and having that coordination when you know what the local weather event is going to be. So, you're not suggesting that we can do all of this ... regionally or through the private sector?

**Dr. Jacobs:** No, no, no.

**Sen. Cantwell:** Okay, I want to clarify this, because this is what is going on now when we shortchange resources. And I don't want for fire season to be short-changing resources. These events come up in very dramatic form, and can happen, and we need the accuracy.

And the last thing is, I want to see, I hope, given all of my experiences and we also, you know, we've had a lot of natural disasters in the state of Washington. We have the Oso mudslide, which has also killed 40 people. A lot less planning to do there, but weather event information could have probably put data out to the community.

But the point is, somewhere we all, collectively, have to come to a conclusion about what we are going to do when we have massive populations in communities, that you actually have to have an implementation plan. So, whose responsibility is that implementation plan?

And so, we see it all the time because the gap, NOAA says, "Okay, well, I'm going to give you the information," and then it's a rural community, and they don't have the plan. So, as I said, University of Washington is filling that gap, [but] what can we do now that we've had 27 extreme events this year? What can we do to help communities get better plans?

**Dr. Jacobs:** Well, going back to your weather service question, if confirmed, I will ensure that staffing the Weather Service offices is a top priority. It's really important for the people to be there because they have relationships with the people in the local community. They're a trusted source. I didn't mean to imply that this was going to be regionalized or anything. As I mentioned...

**Sen. Cantwell:** Some people have suggested that the private sector, you could just do it in one location. And I'm just trying to get to this point that this regional data and integration with the emergency responders is critical.

**Dr. Jacobs:** Oh, consolidating the data, not consolidating the people. I would love for the people to be more embedded in the community.

**Sen. Cantwell:** Thank you. Thank you for that answer. Could you just tell me about stock assessment and salmon and PCSRF and your commitment to that?

**Dr. Jacobs:** Stock assessments, obviously a huge priority of mine. If confirmed, I will do everything I can to get them back on track. I realize that it's a sensitive issue, because without the quotas set properly from the stock assessment data, the fishermen can't fish. It's a very important priority.

**Sen. Cantwell:** And PCSRF?

**Dr. Jacobs:** Yes, Pacific salmon, obviously critical to the culture, the economy, has my support. You know, if confirmed, I would welcome the opportunity to advocate for this.

**Sen. Cantwell:** Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell**

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**Sen. Cantwell Second Q&A**

**[\[VIDEO\]](#)**

**Sen. Cantwell:** Thank you, Chairman, and I do want to echo my colleague from Alaska. I did, you're right, bring it up in my earlier questioning about stock assessments, but I want to echo again. It's, you know, our industries are just chasing a never ending, you know, go around, right? But it all starts with stock assessments as a really basic information and then making sure that we play a more aggressive role internationally to stop the Russians and Chinese [from] collaborating and impacting our fisheries. So very much appreciate your...comments on that, so I'd like to follow on with -- do you think we should have a NOAA Organic Act? [Would] that help [with]...preserving stock assessments in a more robust way?

**Dr. Jacobs:** I thank you for the question. I believe NOAA is long overdue to have its mission authorized and in statute. So very much support.

**Sen. Cantwell:** Thank you. Do you support the reauthorization...do you support the Weather Act Reauthorization?

**Dr. Jacobs:** Yes.

**Sen. Cantwell:** Okay. Do you support replacing...the Northwest, the Northwest Fishery Science Center? When Senator Sullivan was talking about all of these issues, I remember the whole Canadian, you know, threat to salmon and all the work that we do at that NOAA facility in Seattle. Do we need to replace that or make sure it still exists?

**Dr. Jacobs:** If I remember correctly, this was an issue when I was at NOAA last time, and it was something we were working on, and I believe there was discussion of potentially working with the university or something.

**Sen. Cantwell:** I think it just needs to take the final steps.

**Dr. Jacobs:** Yeah, I would love to work with you on that if confirmed.

**Sen. Cantwell:** Do you support tribal government consultation?

**Dr. Jacobs:** I do.

**Sen. Cantwell:** Great. I do think that's something that you know is...not an ongoing effort. We get it, we understand it. With 29 tribes in the northwest, we get what tribal government consultation, government to government consultation means. But I do think from time to time, agencies forget this, and certainly I think even in the last administration, they forgot this. So hopefully you can help restore that.

I understand that my colleague asked about the budget cuts, which you said you supported the 27 percent budget cut to NOAA. Is that correct? So how do you keep your science mission, and particularly in atmospheric and oceanic areas? How do you keep that science mission if we're cutting that budget when, in reality, like...that's a core part of your mission.

**Dr. Jacobs:** So, I appreciate the question. It's a lot of these priorities, particularly, you know, weather forecasting and things we've been discussing all day, some of that's being transferred to the weather service. It's my hope for certain things that that we're looking at to basically fulfill the mission requirements of the forecasting capabilities that the weather service takes over a lot of that, some other aspects transfer to the ocean service.

**Sen. Cantwell:** Okay, so you think that the missions are going to be preserved, just preserved somewhere else.

**Dr. Jacobs:** It's, I mean, yes, that's, it's my objective to make sure that NOAA fulfills their mission requirements.

**Sen. Cantwell:** Great. I'm glad you said that. And we had a discussion earlier where you were saying, no, no, these people need to be on the ground -- you can't replace people on the ground. So you have to have... people that are implementing [forecasting], understanding the local, regional dynamic on weather, and also implementing an action plan. Basically getting first responders, everybody, to help and implement that [plan] based off that data.

So very much appreciate that answer.

But in this... it just reminds me, you know, Boeing said, "Well...we're going to get rid of all these safety inspectors. We're going to get rid of like, 300 safety inspectors. Why? Because that was their main job, and we can just self-certify our work."

Well, that didn't turn out very well, because they missed a lot, because it turned out that those safety people actually were doing something really critically important. In fact, they tried to automate parts of it, and that turned out to be a disaster, and so they changed it.

So I just, I'm cautioning you, and I don't agree with the Trump Administration proposal on cutting these programs -- I think they are essential [for] scientific [and] research information. I'm all for elevating the game. I have been for years. Elevating with more supercomputing and certainly...I think one of the things that we can do is get better information so that [weather] forecast is two weeks in advance.

Why are we cutting these weather balloons? I mean, the fact [is] that the weather balloon is there to tell you the amount of moisture and the condition of the atmosphere. Why was that so important for us with fires? Because the land was getting so dry a lightning strike that may not have caused a problem [and] now all of a sudden causes a problem. So the critical nature changed, and we had to understand that.

So I just, I hope that we're not thinking that we're just going to, like, put weather up here in some big you know, we have this really great way of getting information, like, from the private sector somehow, and we're not going to play this critical role. I don't know, Mr. Jordan, you're shaking your head or nodding, so I don't know if you have a thought on this, but we can't just shift these resources somewhere else, we have to own them. NOAA has to own them. They have to own weather forecasting. We need it to be better. But we can't transfer some of it out and then say that's somebody else. Mr. Jordan.

**Mr. Jordan:** Thank you for the opportunity to provide a comment. So I agree. I was shaking my head in agreement with you, yes, the weather forecasting is very important. The America has a has a robust American private weather industry that really amplifies the work that NOAA does. But it is very important for NOAA to do its weather forecasting mission.

**Sen. Cantwell:** Okay, well, how do we preserve that in a budget?

**Mr. Jordan:** I believe, looking at the budget again, not at NOAA, looking at it from the outside, I see the Weather Service mission, the line office is preserved.

**Sen. Cantwell:** But what about all the work they do to understand.

**Mr. Jordan:** Within the Weather Service?

**Sen. Cantwell:** Yes.

**Mr. Jordan:** The budget, I believe funds the Weather Service.

**Sen. Cantwell:** Okay, so I'm talking about the R&D office of the oceanic...that research group.

**Mr. Jordan:** Understood and sorry for the confusion. And as Dr. Jacobs said, looking at the budget again, having not having had the conversations with the folks inside about what's happening, but it looks like the transition of some of that work is happening from OAR to the Weather Service.

**Sen. Cantwell:** Yeah, I think this is where we're probably in, because that office, the weather research office, is eliminated. So I think, I think what I should do, we should do, is, I've heard what Dr. Jacobs has said. Look, I think we want to get a clear understanding of this. I think we're in a disagreement on this. I think we like this office. I don't think we want to be zeroed out.

We think it's the key to NOAA doing its job overall. And you know, as people talk about killing hurricane hunters, is that correct? Killing hurricane hunters? These are the, these are the people that fly into the hurricanes is give us all the information. Why would we kill that? Why would we kill that?

So let's, let's get a framework here, and we'll follow up with some questions to both of you on this entire regime and how you think it's going to work. But -- and I get your nominees by this Administration, so you're going to generally agree with their budget. We disagree with it. But I think more importantly, let's look at these programs that are going to be cut, and have an understanding from you at least about what you think and how that responsibility is going to get served. Because without it being served, I have serious concerns about our ability to do the job that NOAA [is] requested to do on forecasting.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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