

SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

*Full Committee
Nomination Hearing
May 1, 2025*

REPUBLICAN QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD

Mr. Paul Dabbar

COVER PAGE

SENATOR TED CRUZ (R-TX)

1. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Atlantic Oceanographic & Meteorological Laboratory and National Severe Storms Laboratory lead research to improve the federal government's hurricane and tornado forecasts. Hurricane forecasting has improved but is far from perfect, as tragically demonstrated by Hurricane Helene, which resulted in over 250 deaths across six states last year.
 - a. How will you leverage NOAA's labs to improve storm forecasting and save American lives?

Answer:

The tragic impacts of Hurricane Helene serve as a sobering reminder of the stakes involved in timely and accurate storm forecasting. NOAA's labs, including the AOML and the NSSL represent critical assets in advancing the science that underpins forecasts and warnings. Continued support for innovation, workforce expertise, and mission-driven science will help ensure that forecasting improvements translate into meaningful benefits for communities at risk.

2. My hometown of Houston was hit hard by Hurricane Harvey. Fortunately, the accurate hurricane path predictions provided by the National Weather Service, which incorporated data from the Hurricane Hunters flown by the NOAA Corps, helped emergency management prepare for the hurricane and save lives. These aircraft provide vital data that satellites and drones cannot capture. NOAA only has three Hurricane Hunter aircraft and a limited number of pilots who fly very long hours. A March 2025 GAO report (GAO-25-107210), which I requested, reviews the challenges faced by NOAA's Hurricane Hunter fleet.
 - a. How will you ensure the Department of Commerce complies with Chapter 8549 of Title 15, United States Code, which requires NOAA to "acquire backup for the capabilities of the WP-3D Orion and G-IV hurricane aircraft of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration that is sufficient to prevent a single point of failure," as well as Pub. L. 117-263, which requires NOAA to "maintain the ability of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to meet agency air reconnaissance and research mission requirements by acquiring new aircraft prior to the end of the service life of the aircraft being replaced with sufficient lead time that the replacement aircraft is fully operation [sic] prior to the retirement of the aircraft it is replacing"?

Answer:

I recognize the vital role Hurricane Hunter aircraft play in protecting lives and property through accurate and timely forecasts. I will work with NOAA to ensure that they meet the statutory requirements in order to maintain these capabilities.

3. Last year, an activist Maryland judge vacated NOAA's existing biological opinion for the then-Gulf of Mexico. NOAA must file a new biological opinion on offshore work in the Gulf by May 21, 2025. If this does not occur, oil and gas operations in the Gulf could be shut down.
 - a. Will you hold NOAA's feet to the fire and make sure it meets the May 21st deadline for re-issuing this biological opinion, if confirmed before then?

Answer:

If confirmed, I will work with NOAA to ensure that they meet the May 21st deadline. I understand that the biological opinion is essential to avoiding disruption to vital oil and gas operations in the Gulf of America, which play a key role in the nation's energy security and economy. Timely completion is critical to providing the certainty the industry needs while maintaining environmental compliance.

SENATOR ROGER WICKER (R-MS)

NOAA Cooperative Institutes

The Ocean Exploration Cooperative Institute (OECI) was established in 2019, with five institutions, University of Southern Mississippi, University of Rhode Island, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, University of New Hampshire, and Ocean Exploration Trust, bringing together world-class talent, expertise, enterprise, and experience. Through OECI, members leveraged resources, infrastructure, and intellectual focus in its national effort to discover nearly four million square miles of submerged U.S. territory. With NOAA, and other federal and industry partners, OECI explores the unknown parts of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) for the explicit purpose of advancing prosperity of the United States.

The Ocean Exploration Cooperative Institute 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.

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:

Ocean exploration, mapping, and characterization of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone and beyond are critical to advancing national interests, from scientific discovery to economic development. Public-private partnerships offer opportunities to accelerate innovation and expand capacity in ocean science and technology. As part of this effort, there should be a careful assessment of how Cooperative Institutes can help achieve these goals and support NOAA's broader mission through research, training, and collaboration.

Oceans and Fisheries Data Collection

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. This efficient, reliable, and cost-effective system supports emergency preparedness, underpins a thriving blue economy, and bridges the gap between scientific research, federally certified data, and sound management. Recently, the Gulf Coast Ocean Observing System funded a project to modernize High Frequency Radar stations to enhance Coast Guard search and rescue operations. IOOS deploys, operates, and maintains more than 300 observing assets at 11 Regional Associations. It supports 17 federal agencies, including NOAA, where the IOOS program office is headquartered. The IOOS program was reauthorized unanimously in 2020 and signed into law by President Trump.

In addition to IOOS, the Gulf Maritime Fisheries Commission and other regional fisheries commissions work with NOAA to collect critical data for fisheries management. The Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission's cooperative agreement with NOAA expired on March 31 and a renewal agreement is under review. Until a renewal is in place, the commission cannot fully distribute funds to the state partners and contractors who do the on-the-ground data collection. While the commission is extending some limited resources to provide for short-term operations, I am concerned that a delayed review would cause significant disruptions in the collection of fish stock data. Such disruptions would have a negative impact on fisheries and coastal communities in the Gulf of America.

2. The Integrated Ocean Observing System, or IOOS, and the Gulf Marine Fisheries Commission collect essential scientific observations like ocean, weather, and fish stock data to support navigation, forecasting, and fishing. Would you agree that it should be priority to maintain critical data collection programs which monitor U.S. waters?

Answer:

Collecting high-quality ocean, coastal, and fisheries data is critical to supporting safe navigation, accurate forecasting, effective resource management, and the broader blue economy. The value of maintaining continuity in these data collection activities is well recognized and will continue to be an important consideration.

Manufacturing Extension Partnership Program

Background: The Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) is a public-private partnership that provides resources to manufacturers, to advance U.S. manufacturing. The program is based at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). The MEP program was created in 1988 by the Omnibus Trade and Competitiveness Act to improve the competitiveness of U.S.-based manufacturing by making manufacturing technologies, processes and services more accessible to small and medium-sized manufacturers (SMMs) through MEP Centers in every state and Puerto Rico. The MEP Centers provide expertise to help manufacturers reduce costs, create new products, develop the next generation workforce, find new markets and achieve business success. The MEP program office provides federal funding to 51 Centers located in all 50 states and Puerto Rico. As a public-private partnership, the MEP National Network helped manufacturers achieve \$15 billion in new and retained sales, \$5 billion in new client investments, \$2.6 billion in cost savings and over 108,000 jobs created or retained in fiscal year (FY) 2024.

At the beginning of April, NIST notified 10 MEP centers, including the Mississippi Manufacturers Association- Manufacturing Extension Partnership, that it was not going to renew its funding for the centers. On April 15, NIST announced that after further review, it would renew funding for the 10 centers until the end of the fiscal year as the Department reviews the program.

3. President Trump rightly wants to revive American manufacturing and the Manufacturing Extension Partnership program under NIST helps achieve just that by providing targeted investments to small and medium sized manufacturing businesses. As the Department of Commerce reviews its programs, will you commit to supporting critical initiatives to grow domestic manufacturing?

Answer:

If confirmed, I look forward to working to support President Trump's and Secretary Lutnick's efforts to grow domestic manufacturing.

SENATOR MARSHA BLACKBURN (R-TN)

1. U.S. advancement of quantum technology is critical for our nation to compete on the global stage, but without a coordinated effort at the federal level, we risk falling behind

our adversaries. The results of failure would be disastrous for our nation. What do you view as the most important pieces of a National Quantum Initiative Reauthorization bill, and will you commit to prioritizing advancing quantum innovation in your role at the Department of Commerce?

Answer:

Quantum is a technology that can define the success of our nation and the quality of our lives and is highly prioritized by President Trump and Secretary Lutnick. I join them in committing to advance our quantum success through wise investment in research, including efforts to speed commercialization of American-developed technology.

2. Before the National Quantum Initiative lapsed, I convened industry and government for a roundtable to discuss priorities for the reauthorization and we heard a great deal about siloing and a lack of coordination between the departments. We all need to be on the same page if we're going to win the quantum race and defeat China. In your view, what do we need to do to make certain the reauthorization improves agency to agency collaboration?

Answer:

As a former Under Secretary of Energy charged with science and research responsibilities, I am keenly aware of the need and advantages for agencies to coordinate quantum research and innovation work. If confirmed, I look forward to regular engagement with agency leaders across the government to ensure that we achieve quantum success at the fastest reasonable pace.

3. Our allies and adversaries are building quantum and hybrid applications today to tackle a wide variety of issues across industries—including optimization of manufacturing, drug discovery, supply chain, and more. And they are doing it quickly. For example, the UK has called for applications that could be developed and deployed in 18 months or less. I've reintroduced my Quantum Sandbox for Near Term Applications Act, which would provide more opportunity for public-private partnerships to develop quantum pilot programs, test demonstrations and proofs of concept within 24 months. Do you support added focus on near-term application development and deployment?

Answer:

Our natural principal focus should be on research that rapidly develops commercially-available quantum technology. Preparing for deployment of American-developed quantum technology to customers should be part of the effort in order to ensure our nation's continued technological lead.

4. I have also recently reintroduced my Advancing Quantum Manufacturing Act, which would establish a Manufacturing USA Institute for Quantum Manufacturing. In his first 100 days, President Trump has been focused on bringing American manufacturing back home. Technology is one of the keys to onshoring manufacturing—enabling faster, more efficient, and cheaper transitions. No technology has more promise in this area than quantum. When applied to manufacturing, quantum will increase energy efficiency, advance robotics, secure our communications, design stronger materials, and improve our supply chain logistics. So, can you elaborate on the need for quantum applications in manufacturing, and will you commit to working with me to establish a Manufacturing USA Institute for Quantum Manufacturing?

Answer:

Quantum is one of the few technologies that will determine continued manufacturing success for our nation and the quality of life for our citizens. I look forward to working with you on this important issue.

5. The Biden administration's NTIA BEAD program added partisan requirements to the program that went beyond the letter of the law and were never envisioned by Congress, including burdensome climate change mandates on infrastructure projects, mandates for unionized labor, and overhanded attempts to control broadband rates. We need to ramp up broadband deployment by cutting red tape—especially where infrastructure already exists—and letting contractors do what they do best. How will you work to ensure taxpayer dollars are spent efficiently, empowering states to partner with broadband providers to reach unserved and underserved communities without further delays?

Answer:

It is unacceptable that the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program has been bogged down by burdensome regulations. If confirmed, I will work with Secretary Lutnick and NTIA to expedite the BEAD program, get funding to the states, and expand broadband buildout, consistent with the law.

6. If confirmed as Deputy Secretary of Commerce, you will play a key role in managing US spectrum policy. Will you commit to review currently held government spectrum and ensure it is used efficiently and put to its best use?

Answer:

Yes.

SENATOR DAN SULLIVAN (R-AK)

Alaska Salmon Research Task Force Act

Salmon is a way of life in Alaska and a primary food source for many in the state. Fisheries closures and depressed stocks shake the foundation of our daily lives.

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 variability in the 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.

1. Mr. Dabarr, 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:

The significance of salmon to Alaska's way of life and food security is fully recognized, and understanding the causes behind declining runs is an important priority. The work initiated under the Alaska Salmon Research Task Force Act provides a strong platform, and the recommendations outlined in the report present clear opportunities for further research. I look forward to working with you to build on this foundation and advance efforts to better understand and address the issue.

Consultation

Mr. Dabbar, the previous administration had a history of taking unilateral executive actions that affected our state—to my count 70—executive orders and actions that affected Alaska. On the vast majority of those, neither our Congressional delegation nor our state were consulted.

2. Can you commit to consulting with our office before your agency takes any action that would directly affect my state and my constituents?

Answer:

Alaska contributes significantly to the nation through its fisheries, minerals, energy resources, and unique ecosystems. Given this importance, it will be my priority to engage with your office to gain insight and perspective on actions that directly affect the state or its communities.

Data and Technology

Data and technology are critical drivers of our nation's economy, and I commend this administration for its focus on unleashing technology and innovation. As Alaskans know firsthand, nowhere is this more important than in our coasts and oceans.

During President Trump's first term he released the EO 13921, "*Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and Economic growth*." This EO highlights the need for improved data collection, including improved fisheries data and modernized data collection. The economic basis our fisheries rely on thorough and up-to-date survey data. However, NOAA and NMFS staff must be available, and contracts signed in a timely manner, in order for these surveys to happen on time. As of today, we are seeing serious uncertainty.

3. As Deputy Secretary of Commerce, will you commit to empowering NOAA to continue its important work in improved ocean and fisheries data collection, and accelerate the deployment of innovative marine technologies to enhance economic growth, maritime safety, and national security?

Answer:

There is strong alignment between the goals of economic growth, maritime safety, and national security and the need for timely and accurate ocean and fisheries data. The role of data and technology in supporting America's coastal and ocean-based industries, particularly in regions like Alaska, is well recognized. If confirmed, I will work with NOAA to ensure that it continues its important work in this area.

Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness

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 addition, a strong NOAA and National Marine Fisheries Service—along with a dedicated, professional workforce—is critical to revamping the industry to further the goals of the President's EO 14276, *Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness* to help our fishermen. This EO provides a roadmap to restore the U.S. domestic fishing industry to greatness. To accomplish this, U.S. fishermen need robust fish surveys to inform accurate stock assessments; and timely promulgation of regulations to manage—and open—fisheries.

There is a concern that some of these important Alaska surveys will not happen this year. There is a reason these surveys take place, and we need to make sure that adequate personnel who conduct survey and regulatory work are available and funded not just this year, but in future years.

4. Will you commit to ensuring that NOAA personnel and funding is available at sufficient levels to support the needs of our hard-working fishermen and meet the demands of our President's mission to unleash Alaska's extraordinary resource potential and restore American seafood competitiveness?

Answer:

The U.S. seafood industry, especially in Alaska, plays a vital role in the nation's economy, and the impacts of unfair foreign practices have only underscored the need to strengthen our domestic capabilities. Executive Order 14276 lays out a clear path to restore American seafood competitiveness, and achieving that vision requires reliable fishery surveys, timely stock assessments, and responsive regulatory action. If confirmed, ensuring NOAA supports these critical activities will remain a priority to fully realize the potential of Alaska's resources.

Program Funds, Grants, and Contracts Approvals

There are several programs, grants, and contracts that fall under the Department of Commerce's review that benefit the state of Alaska. These cover a vast number of topics supporting areas such as fisheries development, scientific research, and marine mammal rescue and stranding response. I understand that one such grant is held up has major implications in my state.

For example, a NOAA Prescott Grant has been submitted by the Alaska SeaLife Center, located in Seward, Alaska. The Alaska SeaLife Center is important not only as a public aquarium, but for its marine mammal research and care capabilities. It is also the number two private employer in Seward after the hospital. The SeaLife Center attracts a large volume of visitors due to cruise ships and other tourism opportunities that Seward receives. The grant funds provide the Center the necessary rescue, care and recovery of stranded marine mammals in Alaska. In fact, they are the only entity that has the authority and capability to carry out this work in the state. This grant has been reviewed and approved by NOAA but still awaits final approval by the Department of Commerce.

5. Mr. Dabbar, I ask that you commit to ensuring the disbursement of approved funds and approval of program grants finalized so these important entities can continue to support the economic growth and opportunities necessary for my state—both which meet the mission of the Department of Commerce.

Answer:

The Alaska SeaLife Center clearly provides valuable contributions to marine research, wildlife response, and local economic development in Seward and the broader region. If confirmed, I commit to give all funding decisions the appropriate consideration in my role as Deputy Secretary.

Russian Seafood Reciprocity

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 until I was finally successful in getting the previous Administration to issue 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.

EO 14068 in 2022 banned imports of Russian seafood. However, Russia laundered 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. We are finally beginning to see this ban have effects on the market. American importers are beginning to buy Alaskan "Freedom Fish" instead of Russian "Communist Fish" and prices are beginning to stabilize for our fishermen.

This is about fair trade and reciprocity—not the war in Ukraine.

6. Mr. Dabbar, will you commit to keeping these reciprocal executive orders—EO 14068 and EO 14114—in place? They are critical to keeping our seafood trade fair.

Answer:

Russia's longstanding refusal to allow U.S. seafood into its markets, while expanding access to ours, has harmed American fishermen, especially in Alaska where seafood is vital to the economy. Executive Orders 14068 and 14114 were important steps to restore fair trade by banning Russian seafood imports and closing transshipment loopholes. These actions are showing positive effects, stabilizing markets and supporting U.S. producers. Ensuring fair and reciprocal trade remains a key priority of this Administration.

AK LNG

The Alaska LNG [liquefied natural gas] Project, a proposed 800-mile natural gas pipeline to transport natural gas from the Alaska North Slope to the Kenai Peninsula for the purposes of in-state energy security and the export of LNG to our Asian allies, with an export capacity of 20 million metric tons of gas per year, is a priority of the President of the United States.

Executive Order 14153 entitled "Unleashing Alaska's Extraordinary Resource Potential" states in section 2 that, "it is the policy of the United States to...prioritize the development of Alaska's liquefied natural gas (LNG) potential, including the sale and transportation of Alaskan LNG to other regions of the United States and allied nations within the Pacific region."

Section 3(ii)(a) of President Trump's Executive Order 14153 entitled "Unleashing Alaska's Extraordinary Resource Potential" directs "The heads of all executive departments and agencies, including but not limited to the Secretary of the Interior; the Secretary of Commerce, acting through the Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere; and the Secretary of the Army acting through the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Public Works, shall exercise all lawful authority and discretion available to them and take all necessary steps to (ii) prioritize the development of Alaska's LNG potential, including the permitting of all necessary pipeline and export infrastructure related to the Alaska LNG Project, giving due consideration to the economic and national security benefits associated with such development."

Additionally, in President Trump's March 4, 2025, Address to a Joint Session of Congress, he mentioned Japanese and Korean interest surrounding an investment into the project.

Furthermore, Section 3(f) of Executive Order 14153 states "The Secretary of Commerce, in coordination with the Secretary of the Interior, shall immediately review, revise or rescind any agency action that may in any way hinder, slow or otherwise delay any critical project in the State of Alaska."

7. Mr. Dabbar, can you commit to using your role as Deputy Secretary of Commerce to implement the President's executive orders on Alaskan energy?

Answer:

Yes.

China Phase One Agreement

We all know that China lies and does not follow through on its promises—what I refer to as promise fatigue. During President Trump's first term, I worked closely with him and his team on the first phase of the *Economic and Trade Agreement Between the United States of America and the People's Republic of China*. Under that agreement, China was supposed to double its purchases of American seafood over 4 years, moving from about an \$800 million baseline in 2017 and amounting to about \$400 million annually.

For the first two years after the agreement, China's purchases actually decreased. Four years later, their purchases are still about 7.8% below pre-COVID levels. This latest lie from the Chinese government is dramatically hurting our hardworking American fishermen.

8. Mr. Dabbar, if you end up reengaging with China on this issue, will you commit to bringing this up and pushing to hold the Chinese to their end of the agreement?

Answer:

Upon confirmation, I will work with the Secretary and others to ensure the Department takes a holistic approach in addressing the U.S.-China trading relationship, including consideration of past practices and behaviors by the Chinese government. I will work diligently to ensure our trading partners fully comply with all terms of our agreements.

Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) – Discard Extraneous Requirements

In October, NTIA announced that Alaska will be obligated over \$1 billion. I know you are aware of the criticisms that have been made that the Biden Administration layered on requirements that are beyond the IIJA law in the BEAD NOFO.

9. Will you commit to remove the Biden-era extraneous regulations as you review the BEAD program, and do so quickly as time is money for applicants?

Answer:

Yes.

BEAD - Empower the State

The BEAD program's success depends on allowing states to lead. Alaska knows best where broadband is lacking and understands the challenges presented by our low population density, extreme weather, and difficult terrain. Federal requirements should not impose one-size-fits-all solutions but instead empower states to design deployment strategies that work for their specific circumstances.

10. Will you commit to me that NTIA will defer to states in making choices that they believe will deliver the best possible broadband for their consumers and communities given the amount of funding they have?

Answer:

Yes.

BEAD Technology Neutral and Needs

The unique challenges due to our vast, remote, and rugged terrain make technology neutrality truly critical to serving Alaskans. We need a combination of technologies to be available, including fiber, fixed wireless, and satellite. Notably, Alaska lacks middle mile fiber, and these projects play a critical role bridging the gap between core internet networks and local communities. Given Alaska's vast and remote geography, reliable middle mile infrastructure is essential to connecting underserved and unserved areas and for supporting healthcare, education, and economic development. By addressing the unique challenges of Alaska terrain, middle mile fiber ensures internet access for generations to come. If a one-sized-fits-all per location cap is put in place for fiber for projects in Alaska, it is hard to imagine how any projects will be built for my constituents.

11. Will you commit to working with me to ensure that resources are allocated in a manner that takes into consideration the needs of Alaskans?

Answer:

Yes.