

Statement of Neil Jacobs
Nominee for Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere
Before the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, & Transportation
July 9, 2025

Chairman Cruz, Ranking Member Cantwell, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am honored to be nominated for the position of Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere. I would also like to thank President Trump and Secretary Lutnick for their trust and confidence in me with this nomination.

If I have the honor of being confirmed, I look forward to working with all of you on the important work being performed by NOAA that benefits our country. NOAA has a unique mission that spans the sea floor to the Sun's surface. Not only does the agency conduct cutting-edge ocean and coastal research, but NOAA also provides life-saving forecasts and predictions of a wide range of environmental phenomena.

From 2018 to 2021, I served as Assistant Secretary for Environmental Observation and Prediction, and later as acting Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere. During that time, I gained significant experience and understanding of NOAA's operations, and I developed a deep appreciation of its workforce. From issuing accurate forecasts for complex weather events, managing fish stocks, mapping our coasts, and launching satellites into space, their dedication and professionalism is unparalleled.

I have a very detailed understanding of what is involved in managing NOAA from the policy, budget, and personnel side to needs and opportunities for innovative solutions to better meet the mission requirements. I previously led the agency's effort to support the scientific community through focused improvements to its external engagement strategy. This culminated in the Earth Prediction Innovation Center, which is bringing together scientific expertise from federal partners, world-class researchers, and the private sector.

I also understand that to be successful, NOAA must embrace new partnerships. In 2019, under my leadership, NOAA unveiled the Big Data Project, now called NOAA Open Data Dissemination, where the public has greater access to all NOAA data through partnerships with cloud service providers.

Running a large agency with a public service mandate of protecting life and property during a pandemic was not something anyone could have been fully prepared to do. Under my leadership, NOAA rapidly changed and adapted operational protocols and accelerated onboarding of new technologies like virtual environments for daily meetings, and autonomous vehicles for acoustic fish surveys. Despite the pandemic, NOAA successfully met its mission requirements, including saving countless lives during the 2020 hurricane season, which had 30 named storms and 11 US landfalls, shattering a record that had stood for over 100 years.

If confirmed, one of my top priorities is to return the United States to the world's leader in global weather forecast modeling capability. As a matter of public safety, national security, and national pride, we will restore American technological superiority for this vital service for the country and our military serving around the world. This will require embracing new technologies, novel approaches, and partnering with industry to advance global observing systems.

Reducing the seafood trade deficit is also a top priority. The U.S. has an estimated \$20 billion trade imbalance in seafood, much of it due to unfair trade practices, the import of aquaculture seafood, which is often mislabeled, and lack of domestic processing capacity. In addition to promoting the production, sale, and trade of U.S. fishery and aquaculture products, embracing new technologies and science-based approaches to stock assessments will benefit both the U.S. commercial fishing industry and recreational fishing community. Leveling the playing field will also require cracking down on illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing.

While advancing numerical weather prediction has dominated my career, the ocean is where I am most at home whether I'm fishing, diving, or surfing. I began my career as a marine electronics technician and have spent the last 30 years guiding recreational saltwater anglers. I have a unique appreciation for the

maritime industry and an extensive knowledge of coastal marine fisheries conservation spanning the Carolinas to the Florida Keys.

If confirmed, it would be a tremendous honor to lead such a distinguished organization. I can assure the Committee that I will do my best to ensure this team of scientists, engineers, forecasters and uniformed officers have the resources and leadership needed to fulfill their mission of science, service, and stewardship.

I would like to thank my family and friends for their support and encouragement along the way. I would also like to thank all the amazing people of NOAA for their dedication and service, and for sharing their knowledge and passion with me during my previous tenure at NOAA. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Cantwell, and Members of the Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to be here and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.