

**Testimony of Jainey K. Bavishi**  
**Nominee for Assistant Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere, U.S. Department of**  
**Commerce**  
**Before the United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation**  
**November 17, 2021**

Chair Cantwell, Ranking Member Wicker, Members of the Committee, my name is Jainey Bavishi, and I currently serve as the Director of the New York City Mayor's Office of Climate Resiliency. I am honored to be nominated by President Biden for the position of Assistant Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere. I am especially grateful to the Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo and NOAA Administrator Dr. Rick Spinrad for their support of my nomination. I also want to thank members of the Committee and staff for taking time to meet with me to share their perspectives.

I have spent nearly twenty years working to bolster the resilience of communities, infrastructure, and economies to withstand the impacts of extreme weather and rising seas, which are both amplified by climate change. When Hurricane Katrina made landfall on the Gulf Coast, I felt personally compelled to assist in the recovery and spent the next four years supporting both rural and urban communities in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. It was early in my career that I came to appreciate that the most economically and socially vulnerable communities are often the most environmentally vulnerable, which is why I have always sought to center equity in my work.

Following my time on the Gulf Coast, I transitioned to NOAA, just a few months before the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill. I staffed the NOAA "war room," which was established to respond to the crisis, for the duration of the initial 90-day response. That experience gave me deep insight into the use of scientific data and information to guide operations and policy. NOAA's scientific products informed everything from day-to-day response operations to seafood safety to economic recovery to long-term restoration.

I later moved to Honolulu where I led a nonprofit initiative that built partnerships between academia, communities, government, and the private sector to scale innovative approaches to disaster risk reduction in the Asia Pacific region. For example, with a team of researchers from Hawaii, I worked on a project to scale community-based landslide early warning systems in Indonesian villages. Our work led to a national commitment to establish the early warning system in 1,000 communities. My experience underscored the importance of partnerships to advance enduring and innovative solutions.

I then worked at the White House Council on Environmental Quality, where my purview included supporting the resilience of Alaska Native villages on the frontlines of climate change. I visited Shaktoolik, a village that is actively addressing the impacts of thawing sea ice and increasing storm surge. Through this work, I gained a deep appreciation for how traditional ecological knowledge can complement climate science and reveal important social and cultural insights about the impacts of climate change.

For the last five years, I have led New York City's multi-hazard resilience strategy, which encompasses over \$20 billion worth of projects citywide. One aspect of my portfolio is the construction of coastal resilience projects that protect our waterfront neighborhoods from devastating storm surge and regular tidal flooding. These complex, first-of-their-kind projects involve rigorous scientific and technical analysis, coordination with all levels of government and private partners, and robust engagement with community. These experiences have provided me with invaluable insight into effective leadership and management, especially with many diverse stakeholders.

I believe these varied experiences have prepared me well to advance NOAA's mission. Never has that mission been more critical to the future of our nation. Just in the last summer alone, our country experienced devastating heatwaves in the normally temperate Pacific Northwest, which caused the deaths of hundreds and wreaked havoc on Pacific salmon and other important fisheries; Hurricane Ida, whose storm surge ravaged Louisiana and Mississippi before creating unprecedented flash flooding in New York and New Jersey; and a historical multi-year drought in the West.

If confirmed, I would deploy NOAA's products and services in a user-friendly and accessible way to support local, state and Tribal governments, the private sector and Federal agency partners to better plan and make informed decisions in a changing climate. I would ensure NOAA advances both environmental stewardship and economic opportunity to unlock new jobs and foster growth while transforming to a clean energy economy, building resilience to climate impacts, and conserving our natural resources. I would work to restore habitat and strengthen the nation's coastlines to protect ecosystems, communities, and infrastructure from disruptive, and often devastating, climate impacts. Finally, I would focus on recruiting the next generation of scientists and environmentalists so that they reflect the diversity of our country.

In closing, thank you for your consideration and the opportunity to testify here today. I look forward to your questions.