

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

Full Committee

“Establishing an Independent NOAA”

Neil Jacobs

Questions submitted by Rep. Max Miller, Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

1. I chaired an Environment Subcommittee hearing last month on reauthorizing the Weather Act. I asked all the witnesses a question that tried to understand what level of engagement exists between the Interagency Council for Advancing Meteorological Service (ICAMS) and the private sector. Do you think ICAMS has effectively engaged all the potential partners in the private sector of the weather enterprise?

There is a lot more that ICAMS can do to engage industry stakeholders. Broad outreach is essential. Various federal agencies have their own programs to engage stakeholders; however, it is not clear that these agencies are using those programs to coordinate across other federal agencies and departments. This isn't exactly something ICAMS can do itself, but rather ICAMS should serve as the convening and coordinating body to facilitate those interactions. Another option is for ICAMS to engage industry trade organizations and use them to reach more private sector stakeholders. The part of ICAMS that is tasked with doing this is the Committee on Research and Innovation. There doesn't appear to be any upcoming ICAMS public events listed on the website for 2023. The challenge is that the private sector is moving rapidly and has a short attention span. Engagement should be on a regular cadence.

Does an independent NOAA grant the ability or flexibility to better engage partners outside of the federal government?

It would certainly remove a layer of process and approval at the DOC level. There are many aspects of engagement that NOAA does very well, such as research funded with extramural grants to universities and Cooperative Institutes. When it comes to engaging industry, various programs in some Line Offices, such as the WRN Ambassador program in NWS, are great; however, other programs across NOAA would benefit from additional private sector engagement. An independent NOAA would certainly have a stronger outreach, PR, and marketing capability, provided it was adequately funded.

2. I represent a district that touches the shoreline of Lake Erie on the western side of Cleveland. The marine economy, which includes oceans, seaports, and the Great Lakes, accounts for roughly 1.7 percent, or \$361 billion, of the U.S. GDP. So it's a critical industry we're talking about and NOAA has embarked on supporting the "New Blue Economy." As the former leaders of NOAA, do you think the success of these types of initiatives is inhibited or helped by NOAA's location within the Department of Commerce?

In my experience, the added layers of bureaucracy at DOC come with no additional benefit, so it's straightforward to see that it is not helping. Most, if not all, initiatives, including what NOAA does for the Great Lakes regions, are inhibited to some degree. It's just a matter of how much, which can vary based on competing priorities.

What types of bureaucratic hurdles most frequently come up when NOAA is trying to conduct its mission, but the activities might be of interest to someone within the larger Department?

Most of the hurdles actually arise because of a lack of interest at the Department level. These can range from major program delays or cuts that DOC does not see as a priority even if NOAA does to something as simple as having to get additional approvals for press releases, public remarks, website updates, or all-hands emails. The employees at DOC are great people, but they often don't understand a lot of the mission requirements, science, or programs at NOAA, so having these additional hurdles serves no purpose. The lack of benefit is likely mutual, as it's probably not the best use of DOC employee's time to process NOAA actions that are so far out of scope from the rest of DOC's mission.



Rear Admiral Tim Gallaudet PhD, US Navy (ret)
Responses to Representative Miller regarding
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY
Full Committee Hearing on
“Establishing an Independent NOAA”

April 18, 2023

Question 1: I chaired an Environment Subcommittee hearing last month on reauthorizing the Weather Act. I asked all the witnesses a question that tried to understand what level of engagement exists between the Interagency Council for Advancing Meteorological Service (ICAMS) and the private sector. Do you think ICAMS has effectively engaged all the potential partners in the private sector of the weather enterprise? Does an independent NOAA grant the ability or flexibility to better engage partners outside of the federal government?

Answer: ICMAS has begun to effectively engage potential partners in the private sector of the weather enterprise but there is more that can be done to engage and leverage private sector capability. ICAMS Executive Director Dr. Scott Weaver has met with me, and we have spoken on the phone several times about improving ICAMS coordination with the private sector. That led to his inviting me to moderate a panel at the 2022 Annual Meeting of the American Meteorological Society (AMS) that was coordinated by ICAMS. The topic of the panel was “Federal Meteorological Enterprise Coordination for Advancing Science and Services.” My invitation was a positive development because I represent several companies in the U.S. weather enterprise, and 1 of the 4 panel members was from industry ([Lynker](#)). The kickoff speaker was the NOAA Administrator Dr. Rick Spinrad, and much of the panel discussion involved public-private partnerships, which was also a step in the right direction. Other examples include [ICAMS' Federal Register RFI](#) last fall and the [ICAMS listening sessions](#)

However, the engagement thus far has largely been reliant on inbound interest from the private sector rather than intentional outbound engagement on the part of ICAMS. ICAMS can more deeply engage with the private sector by actively identifying and engaging with potential partners across the federal weather enterprise. Many Federal offices that perform meteorological services are unaware of the remarkable advances being made in weather data collection, prediction, and decision support in industry. I have recommended to Dr. Weaver that ICAMS convene a *Meteorological Services Partnerships Summit* to bring together representatives from the Federal Government, academia, and industry to explore partnership opportunities that will collectively improve meteorological services for the nation. The idea is similar to the [2019 White House Ocean Science and Technology Partnerships Summit](#) that I helped lead and which reinforced or initiated over a dozen formal partnerships between NOAA, other Federal offices, industry, academia, and philanthropies. Additionally, ICAMS should host an open Science Meeting, similar to other government science meetings, and seek sponsorship by participating private companies with the objectives of highlighting major ICAMS coordinated research and raising awareness about ICAMS among the weather community and general public. Dr. Weaver is very supportive of hosting such a summit and science meeting, but given that OSTP's primary focus is on developing long term [climate change services](#), ICAMS is not prioritized by OSTP at a level commensurate with the national need, including strengthening public-private partnerships.

I believe an independent NOAA will be able to better engage partners outside of the federal government because the agency would no longer need approval to do so from the Department of Commerce, which is time-consuming and has



impeded progress in the past. Additionally, an independent NOAA will be able to better support ICAMS and other efforts within the White House. More of my thoughts on improving public-private partnerships for ocean, weather, climate, and environmental services are in the following Op-Eds:

- [Extreme weather requires private-public sector partnership - The Washington Post](#)
- [We Need Better Weather Intelligence for the Coming Climate Crisis | RealClearScience](#)
- [Three Missed Climate Adaptation Opportunities | RealClearScience](#)
- [Making the Military Climate Ready | Real Clear Defense](#)
- [We need an operation warp speed for weather and climate - The Washington Post](#)
- [The U.S. Needs Open Ocean Data to Avoid an Innovation Wipeout | The Hill](#)
- [Keeping a Weather Eye on US Port Infrastructure Investments | The Hill](#)
- [The Navy Needs to Keep a Weather Eye in its Climate Action Plan | The Hill](#)
- [The Pentagon must prevent its mounting climate casualties | The Hill](#)
- [The Department of Defense needs more commercial data to weather future storms | The Hill](#)
- [Hurricanes like Ian are a growing national security threat — we need better prediction | The Hill](#)
- [7 Technologies Revolutionizing Our Understanding of the Ocean | RealClearScience](#)
- [The Biggest Barrier to Advancing the Ocean is Bureaucracy | Marine Technology Reporter](#)
- [For the Navy and Marines, weather readiness is climate readiness | The Hill](#)
- [The US needs more public-private partnerships to advance the ocean | The Hill](#)
- [The US can better weather future storms by making NOAA an independent agency](#)
- [The Pentagon Needs to Put Climate Clarity at the Top of Its Target List | RealClearDefense](#)

Question 2: I represent a district that touches the shoreline of Lake Erie on the western side of Cleveland. The marine economy, which includes oceans, seaports, and the Great Lakes, accounts for roughly 1.7 percent, or \$361 billion, of the U.S. GDP. So it's a critical industry we're talking about and NOAA has embarked on supporting the "New Blue Economy." As the former leaders of NOAA, do you think the success of these types of initiatives is inhibited or helped by NOAA's location within the Department of Commerce? What types of bureaucratic hurdles most frequently come up when NOAA is trying to conduct its mission, but the activities might be of interest to someone within the larger Department?

Answer: Success in initiatives like NOAA's support to the "New Blue Economy" will be significantly strengthened by making NOAA independent. One reason is that the agency would no longer need approval from the Department of Commerce, which is time-consuming and has impeded progress in the past. Another reason is that an independent NOAA will be free from the budget cuts imposed by Commerce annually for their Working Capital Fund for Shared Services and during the Decennial Census, as I argued [here](#). Such budget cuts make it harder for NOAA to resource new initiatives.

The bureaucratic hurdles imposed by Commerce involve excessive data calls and analysis to justify even the most basic of NOAA's programs and new starts. An example is [Executive Order 13921](#) on Seafood Competitiveness and Economic Growth which was signed by President Trump in May of 2020. The creation of Aquaculture Opportunity Zones is a notable provision of this EO, and the Biden Administration is continuing to implement these and other provisions in the EO. In early 2018, while I was the acting NOAA Administrator, I oversaw several initial drafts of EO 13921, which then stalled in the Department of Commerce for a year and a half. Only when the White House Domestic Policy Council heard about these drafts and demanded that Commerce allow us to share the document with them that we were able to expeditiously staff the EO and secure the President's signature. Commerce did not contribute a single improvement to the EO, and instead only introduced a two-year delay in its release.

To: The Honorable Max Miller
Committee on Science, Space and Technology

From: Dr. Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Jr., VADM USN (ret.)
NOAA Administrator (2001-2008 – Bush II Administration)

Date: May 8, 2023

Re: Interrogatories from Establishing an Independent NOAA hearing – 4/18/2023

I chaired an Environment Subcommittee hearing last month on reauthorizing the Weather Act. I asked all the witnesses a question that tried to understand what level of engagement exists between the Interagency Council for Advancing Meteorological Service (ICAMS) and the private sector.

Q: Do you think ICAMS has effectively engaged all the potential partners in the private sector of the weather enterprise?

A: ICAMS was created during the Trump Administration and after my time as NOAA Administrator. I, therefore, cannot speak to the effectiveness of ICAMS and whether it has engaged all the potential partners in the private sector of the weather enterprise. The phrasing of your question above is noteworthy. The term “Weather Enterprise” now in its 20th year was implemented during my administration of NOAA. I commissioned the National Academy of Sciences to define the roles of the three sectors: Government, Industry and Academics that comprise the Weather Enterprise and assigned each their respective “swim lanes”. I highly recommend the Fair Weather Report to you and your staffers:
<https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/10610/fair-weather-effective-partnership-in-weather-and-climate-services>.

Q: Does an independent NOAA grant the ability or flexibility to better engage partners outside of the federal government?

A: The answer to this question depends on the will of Congress to pass an Organic Act for NOAA that is enshrined in law. For too long NOAA has been an insular agency that relies on internal solutions for its requirements. The agency must receive a congressional mandate to open itself up for business with the private sector and provide compliance to Congress that new business practices have been adopted. Change is hard, but the country and NOAA will be better served by having private sector solutions be part of the contracting mix at NOAA.

Interrogatories from Establishing an Independent NOAA hearing - 4/18/2023.

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Q: As the former leaders of NOAA, do you think the success of these types of initiatives is inhibited or helped by NOAA's location within the Department of Commerce?

A: Back when I was Administrator, NOAA supported research activities to benefit the economy of the Great Lakes region through the Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory and Oceanic and Atmospheric Research. The success of the Blue Economy – is a 100% tribute to the dedicated and hardworking employees of NOAA. Their success toward the mission of NOAA has nothing to do with the Dept. of Commerce. Here is an interview that I did for *NOAA: 50 Years of Science, Service and Stewardship*, recognizing the extremely impressive knowledge and dedication of NOAA employees:

https://issuu.com/faircountmedia/docs/noaa_publication_50_year_anniversary/s/11138283 and https://issuu.com/faircountmedia/docs/noaa_publication_50_year_anniversary/1.

Q: What types of bureaucratic hurdles most frequently come up when NOAA is trying to conduct its mission, but the activities might be of interest to someone within the larger Department?

A: As for hurdles – there has always been friction between Dept of Commerce and NOAA officials. I had cordial and collegial relationships with the Secretaries of Commerce during my administration. The breakdown or hurdles would occur further down the administrative ladder, which were wholly unnecessary. Recognizing that these perpetual problems existed, I worked closely with Members of Congress advocating for a NOAA Organic Act.

I am currently the Executive Chairman of a satellite company, GeoOptics, Inc., <https://geooptics.com>. When the company first approached NOAA to offer how an American private sector satellite operator could provide radio occultation data to NOAA, they were rebuffed from 2009 to 2016. NESDIS said they could not buy from commercial satellite companies even though I knew they had the authority. NOAA and Dept of Commerce officials made it next to impossible for small commercial Sat companies to do business with NOAA. I am not speaking about large satellite integrators that build geostationary satellites. GeoOptics was forced to effectively lobby Congress for four years (HR 2413, 1561 & 353), and language was included in the *Weather Research and Forecasting Innovation Act* to enable commercial satellite operators to sell their data to NOAA.