

POST-HEARING QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
DR. KATHRYN SULLIVAN
NOMINEE FOR
UNDER SECRETARY OF COMMERCE FOR OCEANS AND ATMOSPHERE AND ADMINISTRATOR OF THE
NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION (NOAA)
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SENATOR THUNE

NOAA mission and fiscal prioritization

1. Dr. Sullivan, today, NOAA faces many challenges, including maintaining continuity in coverage for weather satellites, making needed improvements in fisheries management, and continuing the restoration of the Gulf of Mexico following the Macondo well blowout. And, like all federal agencies, NOAA must adjust to new fiscal realities. This presents a real management challenge.

Given these challenges, and the growing private-sector demands for timely and accurate information from NOAA in all its mission areas, how will you prioritize and allocate limited resources across the wide span of NOAA's missions?

Response: You are exactly right that the demands for our products are increasing while all of our missions are strained under sequestration and the uncertainty surrounding funding. In the face of declining budgets, one of my top priorities is to continue to find balance among our numerous mission areas. However, sustaining these cuts into future fiscal years will increase the impacts to our ability to deliver the services the Nation relies on and decrease our ability to conduct the research and development that continues to improve our services. If confirmed, addressing the immediate and ongoing challenges of sequestration and ensuring the continuity of NOAA's incredibly valuable programs will be a high priority of mine.

National Integrated Drought Information System

2. Dr. Sullivan, recently, the Commerce committee favorably reported S. 376, The Drought Information Act of 2013, which reauthorizes the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS). This program, with NOAA as the lead federal agency, provides an effective drought early warning system; coordinates research in support of the drought early warning system; and builds upon existing forecasting and assessment programs and partnerships. Drought issues are always a concern in South Dakota, so drought early warning is important.

What successes have come from the NIDIS program and what challenges do you see with the current program? Are you supportive of NIDIS's reauthorization?

Response: Yes, I support the reauthorization for this very important program. Since the inception of the program in 2007, NIDIS has been providing a dynamic and accessible drought information system that enables users to determine the potential impacts of drought and the associated risks, as well as provides them with decision support tools to prepare for, and mitigate, the effects of drought. As such, the program has garnered strong user support. With 41% of the Nation currently suffering from drought, it is more critical now than ever before that credible information is made available in a timely manner, so that people and communities have as much time as possible to plan and respond. To meet this need, the U.S. Drought Portal – a one-stop-shop for credible and easily accessible drought information and products – has been a successful tool for both the public and private sectors.

Another successful element of NIDIS is the implementation of regional drought early warning information systems. A relatively new, but successful area of focus for NIDIS is working with livestock producers to manage risks related to drought. One specific example is a series of workshops across South Dakota on drought risk management for cattle producers that connect climatology, economics and insurance, rangeland management, vegetative health and productivity, and water resource management in a way that ranchers could use to help plan and prepare better for drought.

Much of the support that NIDIS has generated, and the program's ability to meet the Nation's needs, results from the strong partnerships that the program has with other agencies, outreach organizations, and an enabling set of programs and observational capabilities. We also hope to build on these partnerships to launch the Drought Resilience Partnership, called for in the President's Climate Action Plan, to develop new ways to deliver drought information and tools nationwide. Maintaining these critical partnerships is the biggest strength and the biggest challenge facing the program, along with declining budgets.

NOAA satellite programs

3. Dr. Sullivan, NOAA's satellite programs, primarily run by the National Environmental Satellite, Data, and Information Service (NESDIS), comprise nearly 20 percent of the Department of Commerce's budget. The two most prominent programs, the Joint Polar Satellite System (JPSS) and the Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellite-R series (GOES-R), together accounted for one-third of NOAA's fiscal year 2013 budget request. Satellite program challenges have already resulted in some milestones being extended, risking gaps in critical satellite coverage and requiring careful management of resources to keep the program on track. At the same time, certain satellite programs have had a history of poor management, and, in spite of improvements, NOAA's satellite programs have been named one of the top five management challenges facing the Department of Commerce in a recent Office of Inspector General (OIG) report (Report no. OIG-13-003, November 9, 2012). Further, recent analysis by the Government Accountability Office indicates that both JPSS and GOES-R continue to be threatened by schedule slips and inadequate contingency plans (reports GAO-13-676 and GAO-13-597, respectively).

Moving forward, what steps do you intend to take to ensure that NOAA can continue to provide vital environmental and weather data from these satellites?

Response: These satellite programs are National assets which have received significant attention from the Congress and the Administration. Over the past several years, significant changes have been made to ensure the appropriate management, scope, and acquisition strategies are in place to enable these satellite programs to remain on schedule and within budget in order to meet the Nation's weather and environmental data needs. Many of these changes implemented the recommendations of the GAO, OIG, Congressional direction, and views of a group of eminent satellite acquisition experts. Over the last year, the JPSS program made significant progress, remaining on schedule and in budget and repeatedly meeting critical milestones. The JPSS program has reduced the life cycle cost to \$11.3 billion by transferring non-weather instruments to NASA and other programs within NOAA, trimming content, and improving efficiency. In regards to the GOES-R Series Program, both NOAA and NASA have worked to ensure that it is executed on budget and on schedule. However, a \$54 million reduction from the sequestration and rescission that was included in the enacted FY 2013 appropriations required the program to change the committed launch dates for GOES-R from the 1st Quarter of FY 2016 to the 2nd Quarter FY 2016, and to move the committed launch dates for GOES-S from the 2nd Quarter FY 2017 to the 3rd Quarter FY 2017. The Program will continue to work aggressively in order to have GOES-R and GOES-S ready as early as possible. To keep JPSS and GOES-R on schedule and within budget, we need the requested appropriations in the President's FY 2014 Budget. I can assure you I am focused on ensuring NOAA's satellites are managed efficiently and effectively and will continue to do so if I am confirmed.

National Weather Service

- 4. Recent examples of funds being inappropriately moved around within the National Weather Service call for increased top-level attention to be paid to this important line office. The National Academy of Public Administration has released a report entitled, "Forecast for the Future: Assuring the Capacity of the National Weather Service." This report made several recommendations to move the Weather Service forward. The NWS plays a key role in South Dakota agriculture, as it does for various sectors of the economy around the nation, because at the end of the day, we all rely on the predictive weather intelligence NWS provides.**

What role will you play, if confirmed, in supporting the National Weather Service as it seeks to implement reforms? Are there particular reforms you would prioritize?

Response: I am a strong believer that organizations must evolve to keep up with rapidly advancing technology and changing demands. If confirmed, my goals for the National Weather Service (NWS) are to strengthen it and to ensure it is the flexible, agile organization it must be to meet the increasing demands for the services and products it provides. I will closely follow the recommendations and advice of the NAPA report, which Congress commissioned. Any change to the NWS must be deliberate and will benefit from the input of many interested parties and experts. We have embarked on a process to plan

that future. It is my sincere hope that in the coming months the dialogue with Congress, our employees, and our stakeholders can focus on how to create a more nimble organization.

Aquaculture Policy

- 5. The United States now imports more than 90 percent of our seafood. NOAA's own Aquaculture Policy states that the agency will “encourage and foster sustainable aquaculture development.”**

How will you work within NOAA and with other agencies to streamline aquaculture regulations so that the U.S. can capitalize on available resources and become competitive in the global aquaculture industry?

Response: I share your support for streamlining aquaculture regulations and helping our businesses become more competitive. NOAA agrees that the development of shellfish aquaculture and other types of aquaculture has lagged behind much of the rest of the world, and that aquaculture in the United States can contribute more to the Nation’s economy, seafood supply, and overall food security. That is why the President’s National Ocean Policy Implementation Plan identified this issue and why we are working with our federal, state, local, and tribal partners to streamline permitting processes for marine aquaculture; to provide models, decision tools, and the best available science for efficient and effective regulatory decisions; and to educate the public about the economic and ecological benefits of marine aquaculture. We intend to continue these efforts.

Timely communication with Congress

- 6. Written questions for the record are an important way for our Committee Members to understand better the positions of the Departments and agencies over which we have jurisdiction. We hope that those Departments and agencies view the responses to such questions as an opportunity to further educate Members about their challenges and views.**

NOAA has not been as responsive to this Committee as many of us expect. In one instance in the 112th Congress, NOAA failed to provide answers to questions for the record ten months after the questions were submitted to the agency and eventually the hearing record was closed with no NOAA response. This Congress, timeliness and responsiveness from NOAA has improved, especially following our most recent nomination hearing and confirmation of Dr. Mark Schaefer for Deputy Administrator at NOAA.

Should you be confirmed, will you do your best to ensure that communications between NOAA and our Committee and its Members are timely and accurate? In particular, I would appreciate responses to substantive questions for the record within no more than three months; in cases where official responses on that timeline are impossible, I would appreciate the agency to communicate the reason for the delay to the Committee. Will you abide by that practice?

Response: If confirmed as Administrator, I will certainly work to ensure that communications between NOAA and Members of this Committee are timely and accurate. Our relationship with this Committee is very important to us, and we will strive to be more transparent regarding reasons for any delays.