

**COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER, OCEANS, AND WILDLIFE
HYBRID LEGISLATIVE HEARING**

March 17, 2022

1:00 p.m. ET

Legislative Hearing on H.R. 3431, H.R. 6491, H.R. 6651, H.R. 6785, and H.R. 6987

Question for the Record for Ms. Janet Coit, Assistant Administrator, National Marine Fisheries Service, Acting Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere, Deputy NOAA Administrator

Questions from Del. Jenniffer González-Colón, PR

Among other provision, H.R. 6987 would establish a new grant program at NOAA to help seaports reduce the threats of vessel strikes and other disturbances to marine mammals. Were this program to be enacted, I could see state agencies and port authorities in jurisdictions like Florida and Puerto Rico applying for grant funding to carry out activities focused on reducing vessel strikes on manatees. However, as you know, NOAA does not have jurisdiction over manatees. They instead fall under the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) authority. In fact, NOAA and the USFWS share responsibility for implementing the Marine Mammal Protection Act, with each agency having jurisdiction over different species.

1. Given this shared responsibility, do you think it would be appropriate to amend H.R. 6987 to explicitly include or provide a role for the USFWS in carrying out the grant program to help seaports reduce vessel impacts on marine mammals, particularly when thinking of potential grant applications focused on species like manatees? Or would NOAA have the necessary capacity and expertise to carry out such a grant program without the legislation necessarily providing the USFWS a role?
 - NOAA does not have jurisdiction over manatees as noted. NOAA would be happy to consult with the USFWS to provide TDA on this bill if requested.

H.R. 3431, *Increasing Community Access to Resiliency Grants*, requires NOAA to establish a centralized website regarding grants available to assist state, tribal, and local governments with resiliency, adaptation, and mitigation of climate change and sea level rise. It also directs NOAA to conduct outreach to inform state, tribal, and local governments of these grants. I've long believed that one of the biggest challenges we face in Puerto Rico when it comes to accessing federal grants, particularly competitive grants, is that often communities and organizations on the Island are not even aware that a particular program exists or is available. That's why I sympathize with the bill's goal of requiring NOAA to proactively conduct outreach activities about resiliency grant opportunities.

2. What efforts is NOAA currently undertaking to inform and engage eligible stakeholders about the agency's resiliency-related grant opportunities? What sort of outreach or technical assistance is provided, and are there areas that need improvement to ensure

prospective applicants can access these resiliency funding opportunities, particularly in rural and low-income jurisdictions?

- We understand that the demand for grants related to resiliency, adaptation, and mitigation of climate change and sea level rise is very high. NOAA strives to make all grant opportunities widely available to all potential applicants through our individual program websites, social media posts, and direct email communications with our extensive external partner and interagency networks, including organizations serving rural and low-income communities. For example, NOAA's Climate Program Office maintains a Funding Opportunities Webpage on the US Climate Resilience Toolkit. This has enabled partners such as the Protectores de Cuencas, which is based in Puerto Rico, to successfully compete for approximately \$164,500 in 2021 under the National Coastal Resilience Fund. With these funds, they are designing and creating a fringing reef to restore and expand seagrass and mangrove habitats to reduce current flood risks and adapt to projected sea-level rise.

Although having all NOAA opportunities highlighted on a single website will help applicants see them all in one place, more can be done. Recent efforts to understand barriers faced by historically underserved communities in accessing our grants, products, and services have highlighted the need for the agency to do more, such as translating resources into other languages for non-English speaking populations. In this regard, NOAA has taken initial steps to better ensure equitable access to our climate products and services, including our grants. This new initiative will be informed by the perspectives gained from several recent Climate and Equity Roundtables, ongoing equity assessments of specific NOAA products and services, and ongoing engagement with representatives from historically underserved communities.

NOAA is also doing more to ensure our outreach efforts reach underserved communities. For example, NOAA recently hosted two tribal listening sessions to solicit feedback on three provisions within the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law that directly impact tribal resources. These are the type of essential conversations needed to identify processes that could facilitate better access to Federal funding from NOAA. This is one example of the targeted outreach to underserved communities which NOAA intends to conduct in the future and additional capacity would help us to connect with more underserved communities to build trusted relationships and ensure more equitable access.

Regarding the requirement in H.R. 3431 that NOAA provide, "hyperlinks to other Federal agencies that offer similar grants," NOAA agrees that this will be useful information to potential applicants but for implementation purposes may necessitate a complementary requirement for other agencies to provide NOAA with this information on a regular basis.