



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

Opening Statement

Ranking Member Zoe Lofgren (D-CA)

Establishing an Independent NOAA

April 18, 2023

Good morning. Thank you to Chairman Lucas for holding this important hearing, and thank you to the witnesses for your attendance and testimony.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, better known as NOAA, is an essential scientific agency that provides services that help prepare and protect life and property from severe weather and climate events. NOAA is also the lead research agency for furthering the understanding of the earth system and its interplay with climate, weather, coasts, oceans, and other ecosystems. NOAA's products and services are used by all Americans in some manner every day. This vital agency supports the economic health of the country and is estimated to affect more than one-third of America's gross domestic product. These are just a few of the reasons why we should continue and even strengthen our support for NOAA.

An Organic Act would formally establish NOAA and codify its overarching mission. Congress has attempted to pass a NOAA Organic Act over a dozen times since its establishment by executive order in the 1970's. The idea of a NOAA Organic Act has long had bipartisan support. However, differences over the scope and details of what an Organic Act should include has derailed previous efforts to pass such legislation. Today's political environment is not going to make our job any easier this time around. However, I am happy to work with the Chairman and my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to elevate NOAA in the public discourse and see what we can achieve.

In the Chairman's draft legislation, NOAA would become an independent agency, removing it from within the Department of Commerce. NOAA currently makes up more than half of the Department's budget. This would be a major reorganization that will require input from not only our colleagues on other Congressional committees, but also the Secretary of Commerce and the President as well as external stakeholders.

All of the witnesses today support an independent NOAA. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today how they formed their views and how the overall mission of NOAA would be affected by making it an independent agency. It is important to get an understanding of the pros and cons of such a shift. It is just as important to get a variety of perspectives on the question of independence as well as other key elements of an Organic Act. I appreciate the Chairman's effort to include a former Administrator appointed by a Democratic president. Unfortunately,

none of them could participate in today's hearing and that is not the Chairman's fault. I look forward to learning from the experts who are before us today.

However, given the significance of this legislation, I am strongly encouraging my Majority colleagues to have another hearing that will provide a wider range of perspectives – not just Democrat or Republican appointees, because this is not inherently a partisan debate, but different kinds of stakeholders.

With that said, I thank Mr. Lucas for his willingness to work with us toward a bipartisan NOAA Organic Act. The draft we are discussing today is a good start – and already reflects some bipartisan discussions at the staff level last fall. I commit to continuing to work with the Chairman on this.

Thank you to our committee members and witnesses for joining us today to engage in this important discussion.

I yield back.