



## Hearing Context

On March 5, 2025, the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology’s Investigations and Oversight Subcommittee held a hearing titled “Assessing the Threat to U.S. Funded Research.” The hearing aimed to evaluate potential risks to federally funded research, particularly national security threats, intellectual property theft, and foreign influence.

While the hearing focused on safeguarding U.S. research from threats such as espionage and foreign influence, the conversation missed a crucial opportunity to incorporate ocean justice as a central issue in protecting the integrity of ocean-related research.

### Hearing Details:

- Title: *Assessing the Threat to U.S. Funded Research*
- Date: March 5, 2025
- Time: 10:00 AM
- Location: 2318 Rayburn House Office Building
- Committee: House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology’s Investigations and Oversight
- Subcommittee: Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight

### Witnesses:

- Mr. Jeffrey Stoff, President of the Center for Research Security & Integrity
- Mr. John F. Sargent Jr., Retired Specialist in Science and Technology Policy, Congressional Research Service
- Dr. Maria Zuber, E.A. Griswold Professor of Geophysics and Presidential Advisor for Science and Technology Policy, MIT

## Framing the Hearing Through the Lens of Ocean Justice

### Ocean Justice Background

Ocean justice is rooted in the ethical consideration of equitable access, protection, and benefit-sharing of ocean resources. It places particular emphasis on communities that—as a result of racism and colonialism—have been systematically excluded from power, under-resourced, under-served, marginalized, and/or over-burdened with the health and environmental burdens of industrialization and development. This includes coastal, Indigenous, and low-income individuals who are the most vulnerable and the most adversely impacted by environmental and climate injustice and inequitable governance.

Key issues related to ocean justice include:



- **Environmental and Social Equity:** Federal research funding for ocean science, conservation, and climate resilience efforts can have profound implications for historically-marginalized communities that rely on healthy oceans.
- **Protection of Marine Biodiversity:** Ocean ecosystems face significant threats from climate change, overfishing, and pollution. Research funding can play a key role in protecting these ecosystems and improving policies for their sustainable management.
- **Inclusive Research Development:** Ensuring the inclusion of diverse, underrepresented communities in ocean science is crucial for upholding principles of equity and justice in ocean management and policy decision-making.

## Importance of Ocean Justice in the Context of U.S. Funded Research

The March 5th hearing, while focused on risks to research integrity, lacked direct discussion on ocean justice issues. Ocean-related research, particularly regarding climate change and marine ecosystems, requires attention to equity and the protection of communities who are often most affected by environmental degradation.

## Challenges of Addressing Ocean Justice Under the Trump Administration and Republican Majority

Navigating the political landscape under the Trump administration and a Republican majority in Congress presents unique challenges for advancing ocean justice and environmental policy.

- **Trump Administration's Environmental Policies:** During the Trump administration, there was a concerted focus on deregulation, with policies that often rolled back environmental protections, weakened federal oversight, and deprioritized climate change action. This made it more difficult to push forward progressive ocean policies or research initiatives that could protect historically-marginalized communities or address ocean degradation.
- **Republican Majority and Legislative Priorities:** A Republican-controlled Congress has historically prioritized fiscal conservatism, economic growth, and business-friendly policies over environmental regulations. In this context, efforts to direct federal funding toward ocean conservation or climate resilience research might face significant resistance, particularly if these policies are framed as potential constraints on industry.

Given this, the discussion of ocean justice and its integration into U.S. funded research becomes even more challenging. This is particularly true when dealing with the complex intersection of economic interests, national security, and environmental justice in the face of climate change and marine degradation.



## Summary of Witness Testimonies

### **Mr. Jeffrey Stoff**

Title: President of the Center for Research Security & Integrity

#### Testimony Summary:

- Mr. Stoff discussed the increasing sophistication of foreign adversaries targeting U.S. research and development. He highlighted instances where foreign entities sought to illegally acquire sensitive technologies and intellectual property, posing significant threats to national security and economic competitiveness.
- He advocated for enhanced security measures within research institutions, including better vetting of foreign researchers and strict compliance with export control regulations.

### **Mr. John F. Sargent Jr.**

Title: Retired Specialist in Science and Technology Policy, Congressional Research Service

#### Testimony Summary:

- Mr. Sargent reviewed current U.S. federal policies addressing research security and identified gaps that could be exploited by malicious actors. He emphasized challenges related to monitoring and regulating foreign influence in research, particularly in collaborative international projects.
- He recommended policy reforms to increase transparency regarding research funding sources and stricter reporting requirements for foreign affiliations of researchers.

### **Dr. Maria Zuber**

Title: E.A. Griswold Professor of Geophysics and Presidential Advisor for Science and Technology Policy, MIT

#### Testimony Summary:

- Dr. Zuber discussed the importance of maintaining open scientific collaboration while protecting national interests. She explained how MIT balances international research partnerships with stringent compliance protocols to prevent unauthorized technology transfers.
- Dr. Zuber advocated for a nuanced approach that preserves the integrity of U.S. research while enabling global scientific progress.



## Questions Framed Around Ocean Justice for the Witnesses

### To Mr. Jeffrey Stoff (President of the Center for Research Security & Integrity):

- “What steps should U.S. federal research agencies take to ensure that ocean and marine conservation research prioritizes the voices of historically-marginalized and coastal communities vulnerable to the impacts of climate change?”
- “In the context of ocean justice, how do you evaluate the risks where foreign entities could potentially exploit ocean-related research for their benefit, particularly when it impacts communities vulnerable to marine pollution and climate change?”
- “Ocean justice communities often lack access to high-quality educational opportunities, especially in the STEM fields. How do ocean justice communities that serve as the home base for smaller research institutions benefit from the open-source research efforts of NOAA?”

### To Mr. John F. Sargent Jr. (Retired Specialist in Science and Technology Policy, Congressional Research Service):

- “How can the U.S. government balance the need for international collaboration on ocean research with the need to protect the rights and sovereignty of coastal and island nations that may be disproportionately impacted by marine pollution and climate change?”
- “What are the key risks associated with ocean and marine research funding that could impact ocean justice efforts, especially regarding data access, control, and management?”
- “NOAA’s research provides communities across the country with vital services: weather forecasting, managing fisheries, protecting endangered marine life, supporting marine commerce with weather data, monitoring ocean health, and studying the long-term effects of climate change. How will the industries that ocean justice communities rely on be negatively impacted by the recent cuts to NOAA?”

### To Dr. Maria Zuber (MIT Presidential Advisor for Science and Technology Policy):

- “From an academic perspective, what role do universities and research institutions play in ensuring that ocean research, particularly around climate change and marine ecosystems, includes perspectives from Indigenous communities and ocean justice communities?”
- “Given the urgent nature of ocean health and the impacts on coastal communities, how can ocean research be better aligned with social justice frameworks to ensure that policies derived from research don’t disproportionately harm low-income or historically-marginalized communities?”



## Conclusion: Advancing Ocean Justice at Every Opportunity

While the hearing focused on safeguarding U.S. research from threats such as espionage and foreign influence, the conversation missed a crucial opportunity to incorporate ocean justice as a central issue in protecting the integrity of ocean-related research. The protection of historically-marginalized communities, preservation of marine biodiversity, and equitable distribution of benefits derived from ocean resources must be integrated into national policy and research agendas. Without these considerations, there is a risk that research outcomes could disproportionately harm the communities that are most affected by a deteriorating ocean and climate change.



## Hearing Context

On March 26, 2025, at 10:00 AM ET, the House Science, Space, and Technology Subcommittee on Environment held a hearing titled “To the Depths and Beyond: Examining Blue Economy Technologies.” This hearing examined the growing field of the blue economy, which includes industries such as offshore energy, marine conservation, and climate resilience, all of which depend on cutting-edge ocean science and technologies.

However, the development of these technologies is in jeopardy due to the Trump administration’s attacks on NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) and the firing of key ocean science experts across federal agencies. These decisions have undermined U.S. ocean science leadership and severely harmed the future of marine research that blue economy technologies depend upon.

The hearing is an opportunity to call attention to how these actions are putting communities at risk, hindering research, and damaging the U.S.’s standing in the global ocean and climate science arenas. It also allows ocean advocates to highlight the critical need to reinvest in NOAA, reinstating fired employees, and fully funding ocean science agencies

### Hearing Details:

- Title: To the Depths and Beyond: Examining Blue Economy Technologies
- Date: March 26, 2025
- Time: 10:00 AM ET
- Location: 2318 Rayburn House Office Building
- Committee: House Science, Space, and Technology Subcommittee on Environment
- Subcommittee: Environment Subcommittee

### Witnesses:

- Shepard Smith – XOCEAN (Ireland-based company developing marine robotics)
- Tim Janssen – Sofar Ocean (World’s largest private network of marine weather sensors)
- Earl Childress – Oceaneering (Offshore engineering services provider)
- Dr. Margaret Leinen – Scripps Institution of Oceanography (Minority witness, Director of the Scripps Institute of Oceanography)



## Framing the Hearing Through the Lens of Ocean Justice

### Ocean Justice Background

Ocean justice places ethical considerations at the forefront, particularly regarding equitable access to, protection, and benefit-sharing of ocean resources. Historically marginalized groups—coastal communities, Indigenous peoples, and low-income individuals—are disproportionately impacted by environmental degradation, climate change, and ocean pollution. These communities face the brunt of the harmful effects caused by the degradation of marine ecosystems, which can result from unsustainable industrial practices and lack of scientific oversight.

Key issues related to ocean justice include:

- **Environmental and Social Equity:** Ocean science funding must serve the needs of the communities most vulnerable to climate change and pollution. Research allows these communities with the knowledge to protect their coastlines and build climate resilience.
- **Protection of Marine Biodiversity:** Blue economy technologies must prioritize the protection of marine ecosystems, which face threats from climate change, overfishing, and pollution. NOAA's role in safeguarding these ecosystems is vital to long-term sustainability.
- **Inclusive Research Development:** Research and development efforts should include voices from diverse, underrepresented communities in the ocean science field to ensure that ocean policies and management frameworks are equitable and just.

### Importance of Ocean Justice in the Context of U.S. Funded Research

The March 26th hearing, focused on blue economy technologies, provides a crucial moment to emphasize that cutting-edge technologies related to ocean conservation, marine energy, and climate resilience cannot thrive without sound scientific research, which, for decades, has relied on NOAA and other federal science agencies.

However, due to the Trump administration's policies—including eliminating NOAA staff and censoring ocean and climate research—the U.S. is risking its global leadership in ocean science. This issue disproportionately affects Indigenous and coastal communities who rely on NOAA's services for weather forecasting, fisheries management, and coastal resilience, among others.

### Challenges of Addressing Ocean Justice Under the Trump Administration and Republican Majority

The Trump administration's disregard for federal science agencies, including NOAA, compounded by

Republican-majority Congress, has created significant barriers to advancing ocean justice.

- **Trump Administration’s Environmental Policies:** The rollback of environmental regulations, along with cuts to federal agencies like NOAA, severely weakened the U.S.’s ability to lead global ocean and climate science efforts.
- **Republican Majority and Legislative Priorities:** Legislative priorities that favor fiscal conservatism over environmental protection have led to reduced funding for essential ocean science research, threatening both ocean health and ocean justice communities.

Given this, the discussion of ocean justice and its integration into U.S. funded research becomes even more challenging. This is particularly true when dealing with the complex intersection of economic interests, national security, and environmental justice in the face of climate change and marine degradation.

## Witness Backgrounds

### Shepard Smith, XOCEAN

- Focus: XOCEAN develops marine robotics for offshore energy companies. They rely on NOAA’s data to guide their research. Smith has expressed empathy for federal employees fired under the Trump administration and is an advocate for rebuilding NOAA’s workforce.
- Relevance to Ocean Justice: As a key player in marine research, XOCEAN understands the necessity of strong federal agencies like NOAA to ensure robust data collection and research capabilities. Without a fully functional NOAA, companies like XOCEAN and communities depending on ocean data face uncertainty.

### Tim Janssen, Sofar Ocean

- Focus: Sofar Ocean operates the world’s largest private network of marine weather sensors and works closely with NOAA’s National Weather Service and National Data Buoy Center. They aim to improve access to data for Indigenous and coastal communities.
- Relevance to Ocean Justice: Sofar Ocean is committed to making ocean data accessible to marginalized communities, but these efforts are undercut by the cuts to NOAA funding and staff, which limit the availability of vital ocean data.

### Earl Childress, Oceaneering

- Focus: Oceaneering offers offshore engineering services, particularly to the oil and gas industry. They are part of the broader blue economy but need NOAA’s scientific expertise to ensure sustainable practices.





- Relevance to Ocean Justice: The offshore energy sector, while contributing to the blue economy, must operate responsibly. NOAA's scientific oversight is necessary to mitigate risks that could disproportionately harm ocean justice communities living near coastal regions.

### **Dr. Margaret Leinen**

Scripps Institution of Oceanography

- Focus: Dr. Leinen directs one of the world's leading oceanographic institutions and emphasizes the importance of investing in ocean science to sustain marine ecosystems and mitigate climate change impacts.
- Relevance to Ocean Justice: Dr. Leinen's work in ocean science is vital for understanding the changing climate and its impacts on coastal communities, particularly Indigenous populations.

## Questions Framed Around Ocean Justice for the Witnesses

### **To Shepard Smith (XOCEAN):**

- "XOCEAN relies heavily on NOAA's data to inform your marine robotics work. How would the loss of NOAA's scientific expertise and data services—due to recent cuts—affect not only your operations but also the broader blue economy, including climate resilience efforts and ocean conservation?"
- "Given the crucial role NOAA plays in ocean data collection and management, how can Congress ensure that it fully funds NOAA to guarantee continued access to reliable data, particularly for communities on the front lines of climate change?"
- "In your experience, how can the current gap in NOAA's workforce impact the ability of companies like XOCEAN to support vulnerable coastal communities, especially those whose livelihoods and safety depend on climate and ocean health data?"

### **To Tim Janssen (Sofar Ocean):**

- "Sofar Ocean's cooperation with NOAA is vital to providing accurate marine weather and ocean data. How would further cuts to NOAA affect your ability to support Indigenous and coastal communities, who rely on this data for climate resilience and weather forecasting?"
- "With NOAA's key role in ensuring equitable access to ocean data, how can Congress ensure that these critical services are protected, particularly for marginalized communities who depend on NOAA's data for their daily survival and well-being?"
- "Considering your employment of former NOAA experts, what are the long-term consequences of NOAA staff cuts on both public-private partnerships like yours and on the broader ecosystem of cli-



mate and ocean research that supports economic and environmental justice?”

### To Earl Childress (Oceaneering):

- “Oceaneering, like other industries, depends on NOAA’s scientific oversight and research to ensure offshore energy operations are done sustainably. How would the dismantling of NOAA’s workforce affect your ability to comply with safety, environmental, and regulatory standards, and what does that mean for ocean justice communities at risk of environmental harm?”
- “Given NOAA’s critical role in managing data for ocean conservation, how can Congress ensure that any new investments in offshore energy technologies do not come at the expense of the health of ocean justice communities and critical ocean protection services?”
- “How can Congress strengthen NOAA’s capacity to oversee and regulate the offshore energy sector, ensuring that communities vulnerable to the impacts of climate change—particularly those dependent on healthy marine ecosystems—are protected from the harmful effects of energy exploration?”

### To Dr. Margaret Leinen (Scripps Institution of Oceanography):

- “As the Director of a leading oceanographic institution, you know the importance of NOAA’s research and data for advancing scientific knowledge. How will the loss of NOAA’s expertise and scientific workforce undermine the long-term goals of ocean conservation and climate resilience, particularly for coastal and Indigenous communities?”
- “Given the importance of equitable access to ocean data, how can Congress better support NOAA’s mission to ensure that data collected benefits marginalized communities, rather than just industries that contribute to environmental degradation?”
- “How can regulatory frameworks be strengthened to ensure that NOAA not only maintains but expands its role in advancing ocean justice and ensuring that underrepresented communities have a direct voice in policy decisions that impact their ocean resources?”

## Conclusion: Advancing Ocean Justice through Stronger Federal Oversight

The March 26th hearing presents an opportunity for Congress to recognize that the blue economy cannot thrive without the full strength of NOAA’s data services, expertise, and workforce. As the United States faces unprecedented challenges related to climate change, ocean degradation, and the displacement of marginalized communities, protecting and strengthening NOAA is essential for environmental justice and social equity.



# ADVANCING OCEAN JUSTICE: Congressional Hearing Brief & Suggested Questions to Advance Ocean Justice

Instead of reducing NOAA's capacity through further staff cuts and funding cuts, Congress should be focusing on restoring NOAA's workforce, investing in sustainable ocean science, and ensuring equitable data access for all communities, especially those on the front lines of climate change and environmental harm.

The actions taken today will shape the future of ocean health and ocean justice for generations to come. Congress must prioritize the safeguarding of NOAA's mission to protect our oceans and the most vulnerable communities who depend on them.



## Hearing Context

On March 5, 2025, the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works held a hearing to review the nominations of David Fotouhi for Deputy Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Aaron Szabo for Assistant Administrator for the Office of Air and Radiation at the EPA. This hearing provided an opportunity for the Senate to evaluate the qualifications of these nominees, their plans for future leadership within the EPA, and their approach to environmental protection, particularly in relation to air quality and radiation issues.

With the EPA's critical role in regulating pollutants that affect both air and marine environments, a focus on ocean justice ensures that coastal and historically-marginalized communities on the frontlines of climate change are front and center.

### Hearing Details:

- Title: *Hearing on the Nominations of David Fotouhi to be Deputy Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency and Aaron Szabo to be Assistant Administrator for the Office of Air and Radiation of the Environmental Protection Agency.*
- Date: March 5, 2025
- Time: 10:00 AM
- Location: 406 Dirksen Senate Office Building
- Committee: Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works

### Nominees:

- David Fotouhi, Nominee for Deputy Administrator of the EPA
- Aaron Szabo, Nominee for Assistant Administrator for the Office of Air and Radiation at the EPA

## Framing the Hearing Through the Lens of Ocean Justice

### Ocean Justice Background

Ocean justice centers on the ethical considerations of equitable access, protection, and benefit-sharing of ocean resources, particularly for communities that—as a result of racism and colonialism—have been systematically excluded from power, under-resourced, under-served, marginalized, and/or over-burdened with the health and environmental burdens of industrialization and development. Coastal, Indigenous, and low-income individuals are often disproportionately impacted by ocean degradation, climate change, and pollution. This issue intersects with broader environmental justice concerns, including air and water quality, which are directly related to the EPA's mission.

Key issues of concern for ocean justice include:



- **Environmental and Social Equity:** Federal agencies like the EPA must ensure their policies prioritize marginalized communities, particularly coastal and Indigenous populations that are at the frontlines of climate change impacts and environmental degradation.
- **Protection of Marine Biodiversity:** As the EPA focuses on air and water quality, it must take into account how these issues affect the health of marine ecosystems and the populations that depend on them.
- **Inclusive Policy Development:** Ensuring policies are developed with a focus on social justice, promoting access to clean air, water, and a healthy environment for all communities, especially those most affected by environmental harm.

## Importance of Ocean Justice in this Context

- The nominees' roles at the EPA will have direct impacts on coastal air quality, water pollution, and climate change efforts, which are key issues for ocean justice communities.
- Air pollution from industrial activities can affect ocean health, while the EPA's efforts to reduce emissions can have positive effects on both marine biodiversity and coastal communities that are highly vulnerable to these threats.
- Environmental protection policies crafted by the EPA in these areas should incorporate a focus on ocean justice, ensuring that policies are inclusive and consider the needs of populations that historically have been excluded and overlooked in mainstream environmental discourse.

## Summary of Nominee Statements

### David Fotouhi – Nominee for Deputy Administrator of the EPA

Testimony Summary: David Fotouhi's testimony emphasizes his commitment to environmental law and public health protection, including the importance of EPA's role in ensuring clean air, water, and land. While his focus on domestic environmental issues is commendable, Azul remains skeptical about whether his approach will adequately account for global climate challenges and the needs of coastal and marginalized communities. Fotouhi speaks of climate change as a challenge, but his emphasis is on domestic regulatory solutions such as carbon sequestration permitting and economic growth, with limited attention to the need for international cooperation or policies that prioritize environmental justice in communities most affected by climate change. Azul stresses the importance of ensuring that the EPA not only tackles domestic issues but also aligns with global efforts to address ocean health, climate adaptation, and sustainable environmental practices on a global scale.

Key Points:



- Domestic priorities are paramount, but Azul expresses concern that global cooperation on climate action might not be fully prioritized in Fotouhi’s leadership, especially considering the interconnectedness of environmental issues across borders. Strengthening the agency’s enforcement capabilities.
- Environmental protection must be inclusive, ensuring that vulnerable communities, especially those living in coastal areas impacted by ocean pollution and climate change, are given proper attention.
- The economic growth focus is valid but must not overshadow the need for environmental justice and a global strategy for sustainable development, particularly given the growing threats to the ocean and coastal ecosystems.

### **Aaron Szabo – Nominee for Assistant Administrator for the Office of Air and Radiation at the EPA**

Testimony Summary: Aaron Szabo’s testimony highlights his commitment to improving domestic air quality, with a personal motivation rooted in his own experience with Cystic Fibrosis. While his recognition of the importance of air quality is commendable, Azul approaches this nomination with skepticism due to the broader context in which these efforts are situated. Azul appreciates Szabo’s focus on addressing traditional air pollution, but it remains concerned about whether the administration’s policies under his leadership will adequately prioritize environmental justice, especially for marginalized communities. Szabo does not mention international climate standards or global cooperation, and Azul feels this is a key oversight, especially given the global nature of climate change and its impact on the ocean and coastal areas. In the face of growing global pressures on climate, Azul will monitor whether Szabo’s leadership can bridge domestic air quality improvements with a stronger international commitment to climate solutions.

#### Key Points:

- Air quality improvements are essential, but Azul remains cautious about whether the focus will extend beyond traditional pollutants to address the urgent need for climate mitigation, particularly in coastal areas.
- Federal and state cooperation on air pollution is vital, but Azul emphasizes the need for policies that also consider the disproportionate impact that air pollution and climate change have on coastal and marginalized communities.
- Szabo acknowledges climate change, but his testimony lacks mention of international climate standards—a significant oversight for Azul, given the global interconnectedness of climate and ocean issues.

## Potential Questions Framed Around Ocean Justice for the Nominees



### **To Mr. David Fotouhi (Nominee for Deputy Administrator of the EPA):**

- “As the Deputy Administrator, how will you ensure that the EPA’s air and water quality policies address the needs of coastal communities, particularly Indigenous populations and those that are on the front-lines of climate change impacts?”
- “How can the EPA integrate social equity into its regulatory frameworks to ensure ocean justice is prioritized, especially in coastal regions that face both air pollution and marine degradation?”
- “Given the global impacts of climate change and its effects on ocean health, how will you work to ensure that U.S. efforts to protect the environment are aligned with international ocean conservation efforts?”

### **To Mr. Aaron Szabo (Nominee for Assistant Administrator for the Office of Air and Radiation):**

- “Air quality is a crucial component of overall environmental health. How will your office ensure that efforts to reduce air pollution will prioritize coastal communities that are already dealing with climate impacts and degradation of marine resources?”
- “As part of your leadership, how will you ensure that the EPA’s initiatives on air quality also contribute to ocean protection, particularly in addressing the effects of pollutants that impact marine ecosystems?”
- “How will the Office of Air and Radiation coordinate efforts with other agencies to address the climate change impacts on the ocean, particularly in relation to air quality, greenhouse gas emissions, and marine biodiversity?”

## **Conclusion: The Need for Integrating Ocean Justice into the EPA’s Policies**

Ensuring that environmental protections are equitable and aligned with ocean justice conservation goals is crucial for building a more just and sustainable future. By integrating social equity, air quality, and marine health into the EPA’s regulatory framework, the leadership of David Fotouhi and Aaron Szabo has the opportunity to prioritize the well-being of vulnerable coastal communities and those historically marginalized. This includes respecting the rights of Indigenous peoples and others disproportionately impacted by environmental harms, ensuring that populations who depend on healthy oceans are not left behind. Furthermore, it is essential to urge the administration to collaborate with marginalized communities directly, rather than focusing exclusively on economic measures, to ensure that their voices and needs are integral to policy development. A focus on ocean justice will contribute to a balanced approach that benefits both human communities and the ecosystems they rely on.