

US Senator Maria Cantwell

Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee Hearing to consider Paul Dabbar to be Deputy Secretary of Commerce

May 1st, 2025

Opening Remarks

[[AUDIO](#)] [[VIDEO](#)]

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome Mr. Dabbar. Congratulations on your nomination. Welcome to your wife and welcome to one of those energy secretaries here supporting you. Mr. Brouillette, I enjoyed working with both of you at the Department of Energy.

I know this isn't the first time you've testified before a Senate hearing and having been confirmed for the Under Secretary of Science at the Department of Energy, we worked together in the implementation of not just the National Quantum Initiative, but your role in [the] Hanford cleanup, and I very much appreciate that.

The Deputy Secretary of Commerce plays a significant role in shaping the US economy. And if confirmed, you'll be a representative for the day to day operations of the department in assisting American businesses and promoting policies that help us create economic growth. But your nomination comes at a time when we've had a significant period of disruption and chaos at the agency. Under Secretary Lutnick's leadership, I believe we've had a series of alarming decisions and actions that are damaging the opportunities for economic growth.

First and foremost, the Minority Business Development Agency, a 56-year-old agency that Congress permanently authorized in 2021 has been dismantled. For those unfamiliar with the MBDA, I believe my colleague, Senator Wicker, was quite accurate when he said, "The Minority Business Development Agency has been a lifeline for many minority businesses owners and entrepreneurs seeking to grow their businesses."

And indeed, Secretary Lutnick testified before this Committee that he would not support dismantling of the Minority Business Development Agency, which helped create and retain approximately 23,000 jobs in fiscal year 2024 alone. This is about capacity building. This is about capacity building within a community that may not necessarily have the same access to capital, may not have the same parameters, and this agency has been quite successful.

But within two months of his confirmation, he has fired all of its employees, canceled all of its grants, and even the sign that once marked the MBDA Office at the Department of Commerce building has been pulled down under his watch.

Meanwhile, the Department continues to slash essential workers at NOAA with approximately 2,500 employees of the 12 thousand person workforce fired or otherwise departing since the start of this Administration. These staffing shortages are already impacting NOAA's core functions, including reduced and suspended weather balloon launches at many of our weather forecast offices -- and I can't tell you how important this is for us, particularly related to fire season, these

NOAA weather activities are giving us essential data about how best to prepare for fire season -- and further cuts are expected in the coming weeks.

On top of that, the Trump Administration is pursuing a 2026 budget proposal that would reduce NOAA's budget by more than 27%, including a 75% cut to the Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research, the closures of all its weather climate labs, and an 85% cut to the Office of Space Commerce.

I can tell you this, Mr. Dabbar, as somebody who ran a science organization, that we are going to hold this Administration accountable for the cuts in science. It is not acceptable. Innovation is the way we're going to grow our economy. It is the way we are going to protect our industries that exist today.

At the same time, the Administration is calling for major reorganizations of NOAA, including moving out [part of] the National Fisheries Marine Service to the Department of Interior. I'm not sure why the most important management resource we have for our fisheries, having our science management system, we would give up to the Department of Interior.

I'm particularly shocked to see this proposal, given that Mr. Lutnick promised to me during this confirmation hearing that "I have no interest in separating NOAA." And that breaking up NOAA "is not on my agenda." What changed?

What's equally concerning is that the Office of Management and Budget proposal to eliminate the Economic Development Administration entirely. I believe this would jeopardize important decisions that continue to help us grow our tech hubs and important investments that keep growing our economy across the United States.

So, I could go on and on about tariffs, while I appreciate many of the things that the Chairman just mentioned in his tariff statement -- yes, I probably would be more comfortable with you leading our Tariff charge than the current secretary -- but I can tell you this, tariffs are hurting small businesses today. They are significantly reducing our economic growth. They are significantly constraining opportunities, and people just may not even be in by the time these deals are done.

And I know that some people think that might be the price to pay. I do not. I do not believe in that view of an American economy, where we lead on alliance building and we lead on moving forward on economic opportunities by opening up markets, particularly big opportunities that I think we have in front of us.

So, that's to say, I very much appreciate, Mr. Dabbar, your leadership in the past. I'm outlining the big challenges I see in front of you in stabilizing the agency's core mission. I look forward to hearing the answers to our questions today, but again, welcome to you and congratulations on your nomination.

Q&A

[\[AUDIO\]](#) [\[VIDEO\]](#)

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, I appreciate working together with you on many energy fronts, including quantum and Hanford cleanup. Mr. Dabbar, do you support the CHIPS and Science Act?

Dabbar: Yes, I've been on the record and testified in support of that when it was going through Congress.

Sen. Cantwell: So you believe in honoring the agreements that are in place with companies.

Dabbar: I'm not familiar with actual agreements underneath the CHIPS Act at the Commerce Department, but the President –

Sen. Cantwell: But generally, if you think we've signed an agreement with a company and allocated resources that we should fulfill them, barring any major problems with them.

Dabbar: So Secretary Lutnick and the President have been very clear about how to take the resources under the CHIPS and Science Act and how to get the most bang for the buck for the taxpayer. And I think the President and the announcement, and Secretary Lutnick was just in Arizona on the announcement around TSMC, moving from one fab for \$65 billion of support to three fabs and \$165 billion with no additional chip support.

And so I think that's a great example of taking the CHIPS Act subsidies and support, and how to get the most out of it within agreements. I'm not familiar, for example, with all the TSMC agreements, but I think that's an excellent ---

Sen. Cantwell: Ok, I have more questions. I actually saw Secretary Lutnick last night, and he was emphasizing how much he enjoyed being there. But I tell you this, this Committee and the last administration got that done. Now I'm glad you feel like you get to rearrange some of the chess pieces, but the President of the United States saying he's not for CHIPS and Science, and then all of us having to push back every damn day is nuts. Okay?

This is policy that we've implemented that will make the United States competitive, and so I just need to know that you're not going to be another one of these people that is going to make this harder for us. That's all we want to know. Okay, will you commit to maintaining the NIST budget and the other R&D programs that are under the agency?

Dabbar: Yes. I didn't know that was a question, sorry.

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you. What about the money for the tech hubs?

Dabbar: Yes, I think, as appropriated and authorized. I certainly know a bit about the tech hubs, but assuming it's funded and authorized.

Sen. Cantwell: What about moving Marine Fisheries out of NOAA and into Interior, also a ridiculous idea.

Dabbar: So, I only know what I read in the newspaper about different potential proposals. I do know that over time, that various proposals have been made about NOAA, including last Congress, about separating it completely. So I would review any sort of proposal, given many have been made over the decades on NOAA.

Sen. Cantwell: I get this may not be one of your areas of expertise, but if you could bone up a little bit more on this for the record and give us an answer. The science that NOAA does helps us manage our fisheries, and right now, we're being taken advantage of by both the Chinese and the Russians, and so we don't want to be more disenabled at NOAA to advocate for our fisheries. My colleague from Alaska, who's here, probably has a thought on this, but we want to be more empowered to fight and fight the injustices against the United States.

We see a huge opportunity for the Department of Commerce to provide that leadership. You want to talk about a trade issue, talk about fisheries and talk about the unfairness that's happening. But we need the science, and we need that agency to be complete on its R&D mission in NOAA.

So what about the Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research that also is being proposed to be eliminated?

Dabbar: Well, just to address your first point Senator, when I was Under Secretary for Science, we had a, smaller than NOAA, but we did have a number of topics around fish and around atmospheric sciences. We had one plane rather than several. There's a bit of a history of that on nuclear weapons and so on, but the fish, as you know, Senator Cantwell, we had research in Washington state along the Columbia River that that I helped run. Sequim, which was another facility, and at Senator Blackburn's state at Oak Ridge, so very –

Sen. Cantwell: I have one more question. I got that you have a little bit of -- you'll come back to me on this point. So, but on the spectrum issue, the warfare of the future is in the skies, correct?

Dabbar: Sorry?

Sen. Cantwell: On the spectrum issue, the warfare of the future is in the skies, correct?

Dabbar: Yeah, absolutely, Senator.

Sen. Cantwell: So we can't give away DoD assets that could have interference if that hurts our warfare capabilities for the future. Is that correct?

Dabbar: We absolutely need to be careful. And I do have a technical, a bit of a technical background on this, and I know there are many people working on how to use the spectrum from a technical point of view more efficiently. So, in addition to just what the actual spectrum set aside is, but also how to manage it better from a technical –

Sen. Cantwell: But you don't believe in compromising, DoD?

Dabbar: Oh, absolutely not, Senator.

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you. Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman.