

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

September 24, 2020

The Honorable Wilbur Ross  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20230

The Honorable Neil Jacobs, Ph.D  
Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Environmental Observation and Prediction  
Acting Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere  
1401 Constitution Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Ross and Acting Under Secretary Jacobs:

We write to express our strong opposition to the appointment of an outspoken climate denier to a top role at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), one of the world’s leading authorities in climate science research. David Legates’ appointment to NOAA obviously undermines the agency’s core mission to “understand and predict changes in climate, weather, oceans and coasts, and to share that information with our public.”<sup>1</sup> As the new deputy assistant secretary of Commerce for environmental observation and prediction—reporting directly to the acting NOAA administrator—Legates would clearly be in a position to seriously damage the agency’s scientific integrity.

David Legates has a long history of casting doubt on climate science with his questionable publications and significant funding from the fossil fuel industry.<sup>2</sup> He has rejected the scientific consensus that human activity is contributing to global warming, devoted his career to discrediting the work of climate researchers, and applauded President Trump’s decision to break from the Paris climate accord.<sup>3</sup> In short, he is undoubtedly the wrong choice to play a key leadership role at NOAA.

For decades, large fossil fuel companies have known about the devastating effects of carbon emissions on our planet, withheld evidence from the public, and funded misinformation campaigns to obscure the role of fossil fuel in promoting emissions on the climate. During Legates’ testimony in the U.S. House of Representatives, he asserted that increasing concentrations of carbon emissions have no effect on rising sea levels.<sup>4</sup> To the U.S. Senate, Legates argued that

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.noaa.gov/about-our-agency>

<sup>2</sup> <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/19032015/u-delaware-refuses-disclose-funding-sources-its-climate-contrarian>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.heartland.org/news-opinion/news/we-should-be-glad-the-us-is-out>

<sup>4</sup> [https://naturalresources.house.gov/imo/media/doc/2019%20US%20House%20Testimony%20--%20Written%20\(Legates\).pdf](https://naturalresources.house.gov/imo/media/doc/2019%20US%20House%20Testimony%20--%20Written%20(Legates).pdf)

increasing carbon dioxide emissions is “a positive and any potential negative effects are minimal”<sup>5</sup> for agriculture, aquaculture and fishing. This kind of science denial threatens the work of NOAA, which has recognized the immense challenges climate change poses for our fishing industries and coastal communities.<sup>6</sup> Climate deniers appointed to lead the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of the Interior have already sidelined climate scientists, removed entire websites, altered climate communications, and prevented scientists from speaking out publicly.<sup>7</sup> More than a hundred scientists at NOAA have reported censorship of the phrase “climate change” in their work.<sup>8</sup> We cannot allow Legates to discredit the dedicated researchers at NOAA in their essential work.

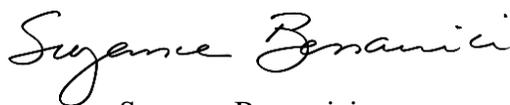
Climate change is an existential threat imperiling communities across America. As wildfires rage and consume millions of acres in the Western U.S., scientists at NOAA’s National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI) have reported that 2020 was the hottest summer on record for the Northern Hemisphere.<sup>9</sup> NCEI scientists tracking trends in global temperatures have also reported that the last five years were the warmest ever documented. A 2019 non-partisan report, commissioned by former Army Chief of Staff General Mark Milley, later appointed to chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff by President Trump, delivered a sober warning that we are “precariously underprepared for the national security implications of climate change.”<sup>10</sup> While Legates promotes the fossil fuel industry’s agenda and derides taxpayer dollars spent on mitigating the “undetectable effects of climate change,”<sup>11</sup> the staggering cost of failing to address climate change is terrifying to the rest of us working to save a livable future for our children and grandchildren.

We urge you to reconsider this decision and commit to preserving the scientific independence, integrity and effectiveness of NOAA. Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter and we look forward to your response.

Very truly yours,



Jamie Raskin  
Member of Congress



Suzanne Bonamici  
Member of Congress



Kathy Castor  
Member of Congress

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<sup>5</sup> [https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/\\_cache/files/a/a/aa8f25be-f093-47b1-bb26-1eb4c4a23de2/01AFD79733D77F24A71FEF9DAFCCB056.6314witness testimony legates.pdf](https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/a/a/aa8f25be-f093-47b1-bb26-1eb4c4a23de2/01AFD79733D77F24A71FEF9DAFCCB056.6314witness testimony legates.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/insight/understanding-our-changing-climate>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ucsusa.org/resources/attacks-on-science>

<sup>8</sup> <https://ucsusa.org/sites/default/files/2019-09/science-under-trump-noaa.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.noaa.gov/news/northern-hemisphere-just-had-its-hottest-summer-on-record>

<sup>10</sup> <https://climateandsecurity.org/2019/08/army-war-college-the-u-s-military-is-precariously-underprepared-for-climate-change/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.heartland.org/news-opinion/news/we-should-be-glad-the-us-is-out>

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