



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

Opening Statement

Ranking Member Gabe Amo (D-RI)
of the Subcommittee on Environment

Environment Subcommittee Hearing:

To the Depths, and Beyond: Examining Blue Economy Technologies

March 26th, 2025

Thank you, Chair Franklin, for today's hearing on the Blue Economy. And thank you to our witnesses for agreeing to share your perspectives.

Since the days of Roger Williams and the Gaspee Affair, the ocean has been central to Rhode Island's identity. But water isn't just a key to our past — it's critical to our future.

Thanks to investments in the Blue Economy, my home state — the Ocean State — is home to thriving blue industries such as commercial fishing, tourism, defense production and shipbuilding, as well as marine manufacturing, offshore wind, and oceanic research. Leveraging our state's natural strengths has ushered in a new age of prosperity for workers, small businesses, and research institutions.

Estimates show that the Blue Economy employs more than 36,000 workers in Rhode Island and contributes over \$5 billion to our gross domestic product every year. Across the country, there are approximately 2 million workers supporting the Blue Economy who contribute about \$373 billion to our nation's GDP.

To find out more, I embarked on a multi-day, multi-stop tour of Rhode Island's First Congressional District's Blue Economy in October. I learned about leaders training union workers pursuing careers in offshore wind. I engaged with researchers and higher education leaders working to deepen our understanding of the ocean. I saw how cutting-edge manufacturing companies are growing their footprints and investing in our communities.

Tools like artificial intelligence and robotics are revolutionizing ocean-based industries and driving growth in the Blue Economy. Rhode Island has companies utilizing cutting-edge aquatic data collected through underwater drones that is increasing our national defense capabilities.

We must continue to invest in the Blue Economy. It supports innovation, our workforce, and our resiliency efforts. It's about protecting our global innovation leadership. We need public, private, and nonprofit stakeholders rowing in the same direction.

I hope there are shared values in our committee about leveraging our ocean to advance scientific research, spur economic development, and defend our national security. But I am, at this moment, not certain those priorities are shared by the leadership at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue at the White House. Time and time again, we have seen President Trump and his billionaire supporters, stand in the way. They have systematically undermined and jeopardized

our progress in an area where we should continue to have great leadership. Take, for example, the whiplash firing and rehiring of staff, the cancelling of contracts, and the freezing of grants across our government — including at NOAA and the National Science Foundation and countless other key areas.

Can anyone really claim that chaos and confusion supports economic development? I think the answer is clear.

Hacking and slashing away at our federal agencies slows scientific progress that is urgently needed, threatens economic stability, undermines disaster preparedness, and can hinder national security. My state has welcomed NOAA with open arms. It will turbocharge ocean research innovation and initiatives that will grow our Blue Economy.

Innovation has always — always — been a collaborative effort between government, academia, non-profits and private industry. Collaboration between government and academia has driven foundational "moonshot" innovations. Private-public partnerships have turned breakthroughs into real-world applications and scaled them rapidly. However, Trump and DOGE and the actions of the last several weeks have worked overtime to turn back the clock. Crippling federal support for research at universities and the private sector are dimming the prospects for future scientific discovery. It is cutting off pathways and opportunities that lead to careers in science and innovation.

The actions of President Trump have driven universities to lay off staff, issue new guidance for graduate students, and push away the very expertise that we urgently need now to continue our advances in the Blue Economy. Researchers are left scrambling. Organizations are being forced into crisis mode and students are dissuaded from pursuing careers in STEM.

These funding cuts are threatening America's already tenuous global leadership in ocean research and innovation. Elon Musk is opening the door to competitors around the world, and adversaries like China, who are already catching up to our investments in research and development.

So I end with this. What does it mean when the United States, a nation struggling to stay at the forefront of science, is unilaterally disarming and letting our strongest scientific tools wither on the vine?

Look, I hope we can find a bipartisan consensus to push back against these decisions. Because if not, there will come a point where recovery may no longer be possible.

With that, I yield.