

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

May 18, 2023

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chair
House Committee on Appropriations
H-307, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Hal Rodgers
Chair
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science and Related Agencies
H-310, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rep. Matt Cartwright
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science and Related Agencies
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Granger, Ranking Member DeLauro, Subcommittee Chair Rodgers, and Subcommittee Ranking Member Cartwright,

One of Congress's most vital responsibilities is holding the Executive Branch accountable to the American people and ensuring federal agencies' decisions remain open and transparent. Congressional hearings are an important tool which elected representatives use to engage directly with Biden administration officials and conduct oversight on policy objectives, openly debate legislation, and spotlight waste, fraud, and abuse occurring in agencies.

Biden administration officials' salaries are paid with dollars appropriated by Congress and ultimately funded by the American taxpayer. These officials have an obligation to be responsive to Congress, engage in the oversight process, and be accountable to the American people. However, when the House Committee on Natural Resources' Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries invited the Department of Commerce and asked for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to participate in a field hearing on H.R. 215 (Rep. Valadao) "*WATER for California Act*" and H.R. 872 (Rep. Calvert) "*FISH Act*," the agency's leadership made the choice not to appear, answer questions, and ultimately provide accountability for their actions.

NMFS would be tasked with implementing these bills were they to become public law. While NMFS submitted written testimony after the hearing, the agency failed to provide a witness to answer any questions from the Water, Wildlife and Fisheries Subcommittee. In addition, non-federal witnesses who actually appeared at the hearing repeatedly mentioned NMFS, creating missed opportunities for dialogue between the agency and the people they serve. Had the agency appeared at the Subcommittee hearing, it could have responded to these discussions.

The Biden administration's clear pattern of disregard for Congressional oversight indicates entitled leadership, which lacks accountability to the American taxpayer. This disregard for the American people is unacceptable.

It's time to remind Biden administration officials at NMFS of their obligation to the American people through Congressional oversight via the source of their salaries. Therefore, as you craft appropriations bills for Fiscal Year 2024, I ask that you reduce funding for NMFS to Fiscal Year 2022 levels or below, consistent with the Limit, Save, Grow Act.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. If you have any questions, please contact Chris Marklund, House Committee on Natural Resources Deputy Staff Director, at Chris.Marklund@mail.house.gov or Kiel Weaver, Staff Director for the Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries, at Kiel.Weaver@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,



Bruce Westerman
Chairman
House Committee on Natural Resources

cc: The Honorable Gina Raimondo, Secretary, U.S. Department of Commerce
The Honorable Richard W. Spinrad, Administrator, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Ms. Janet Coit, Assistant Administrator for NOAA Fisheries